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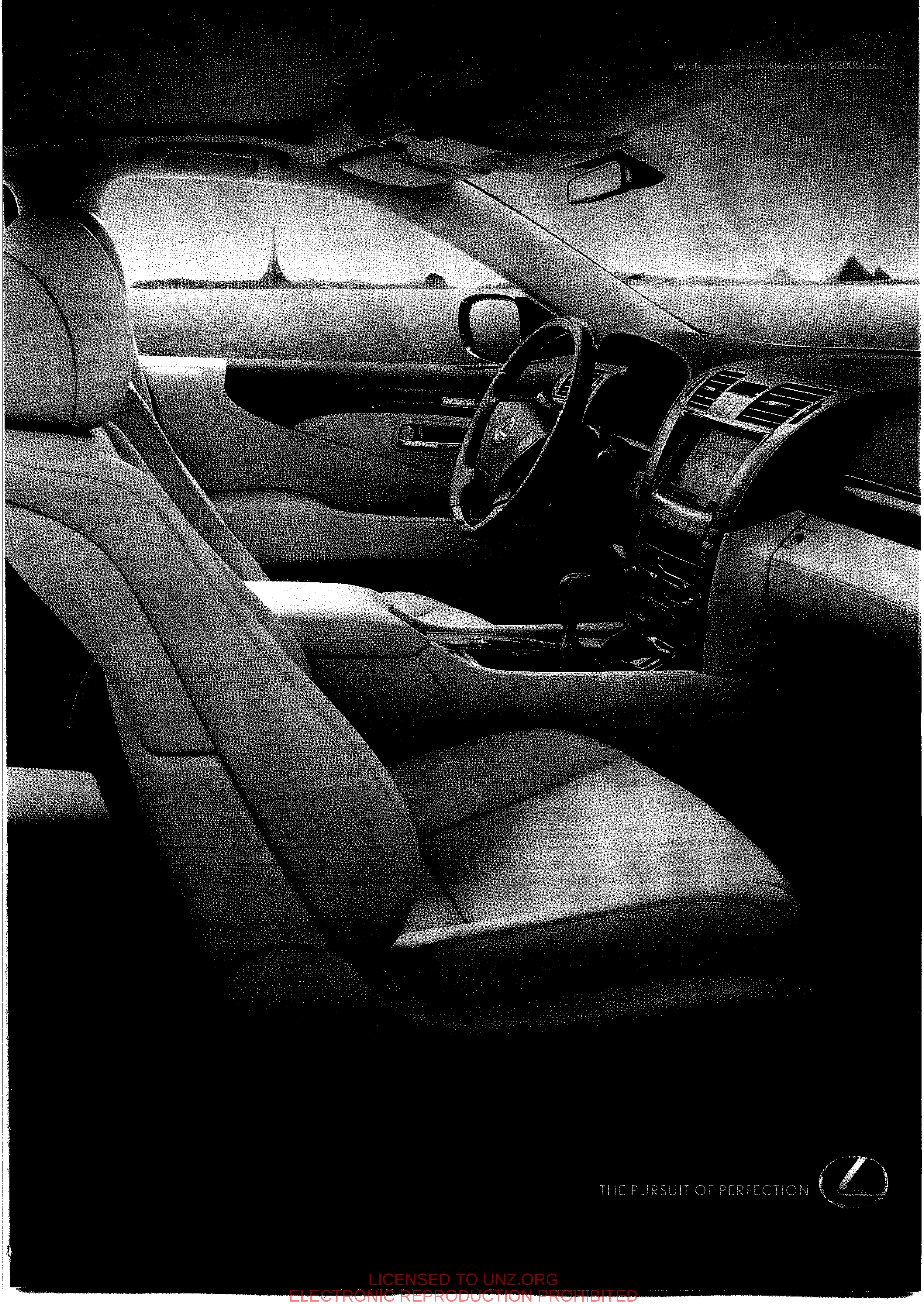
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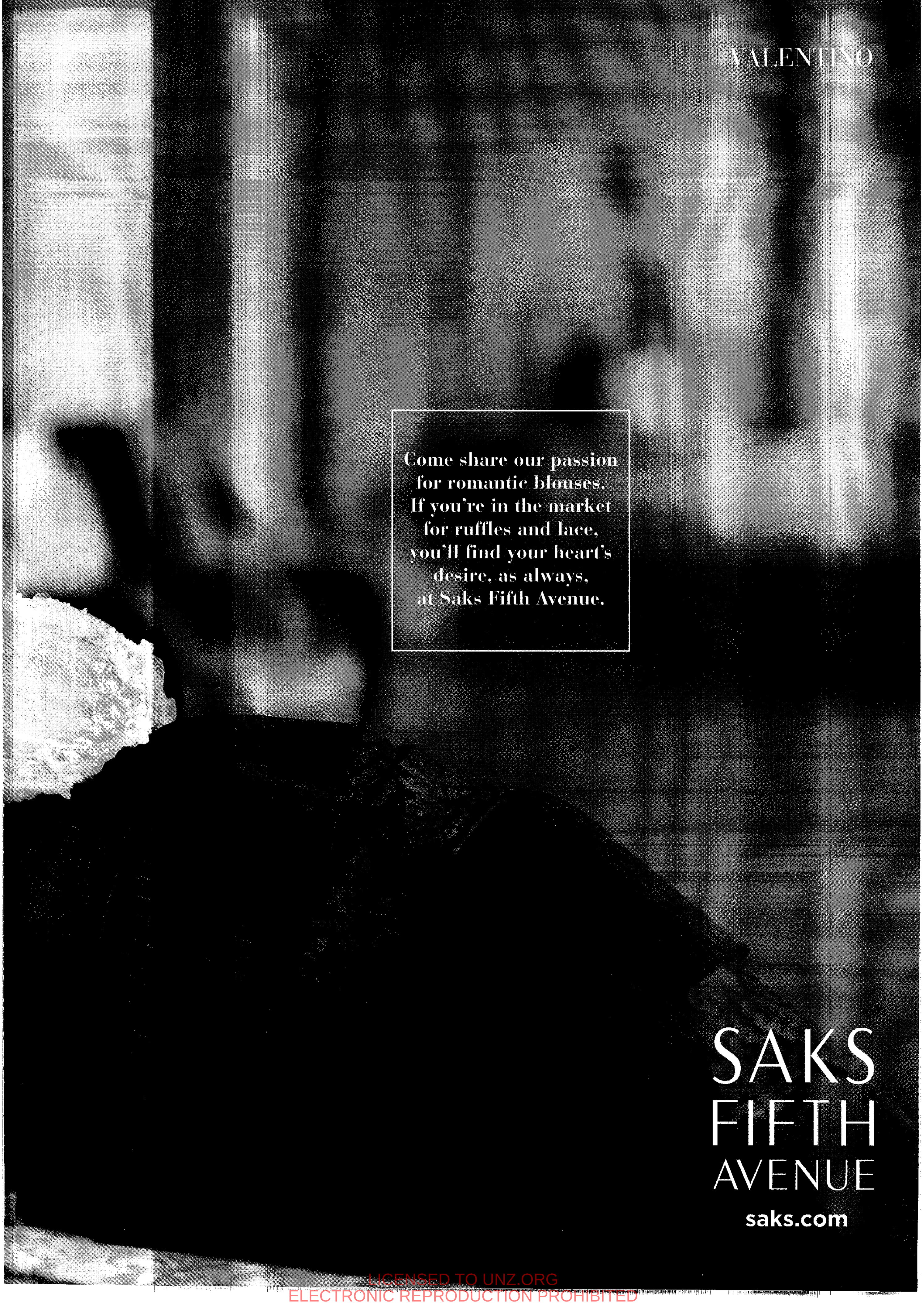
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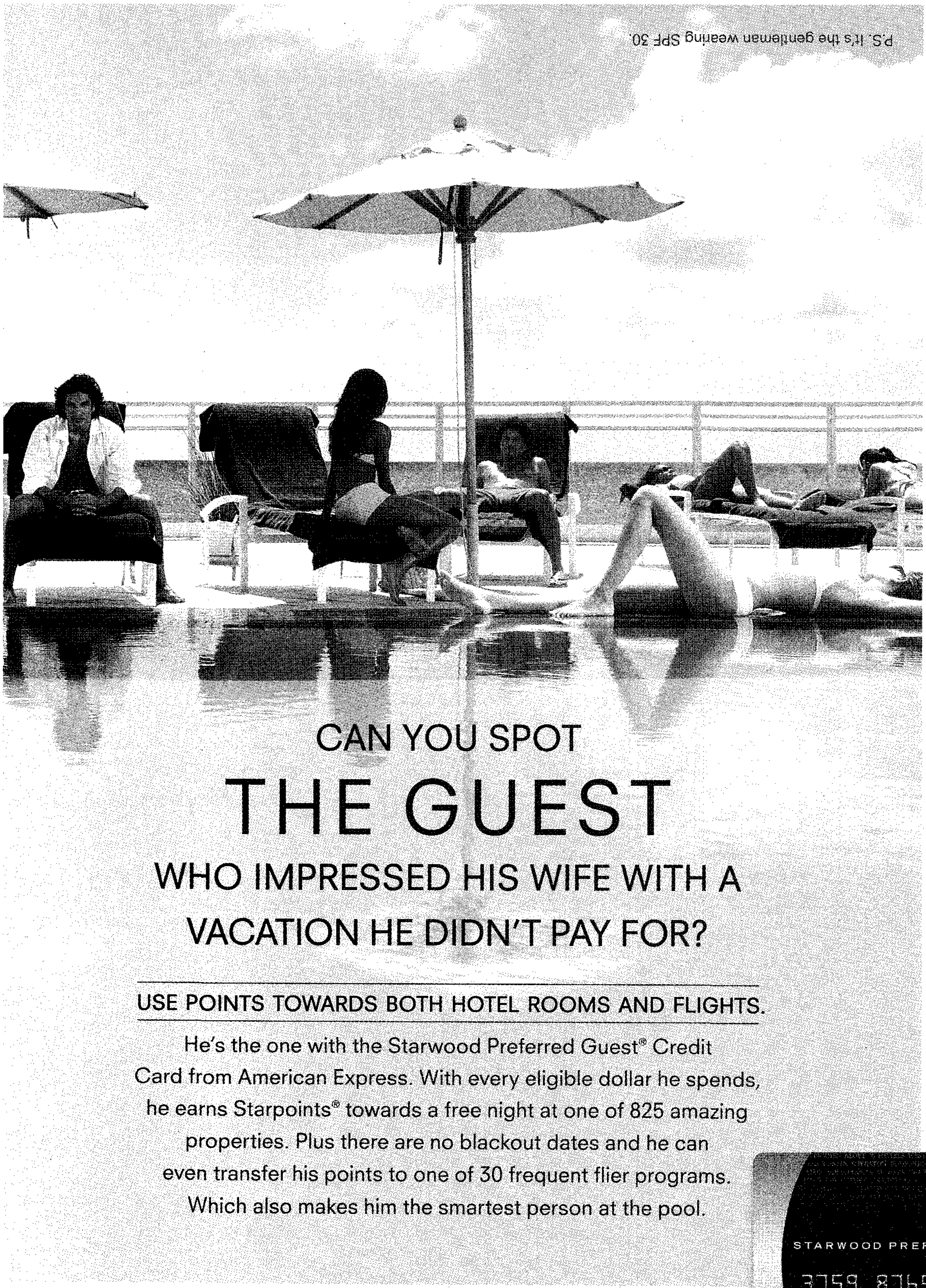
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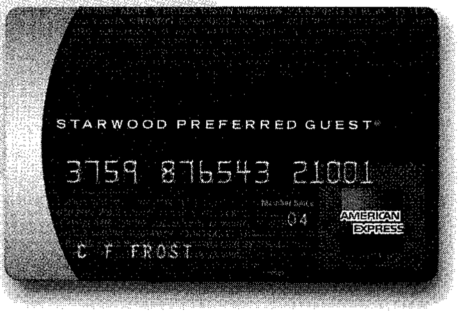
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THE NEW YORKER
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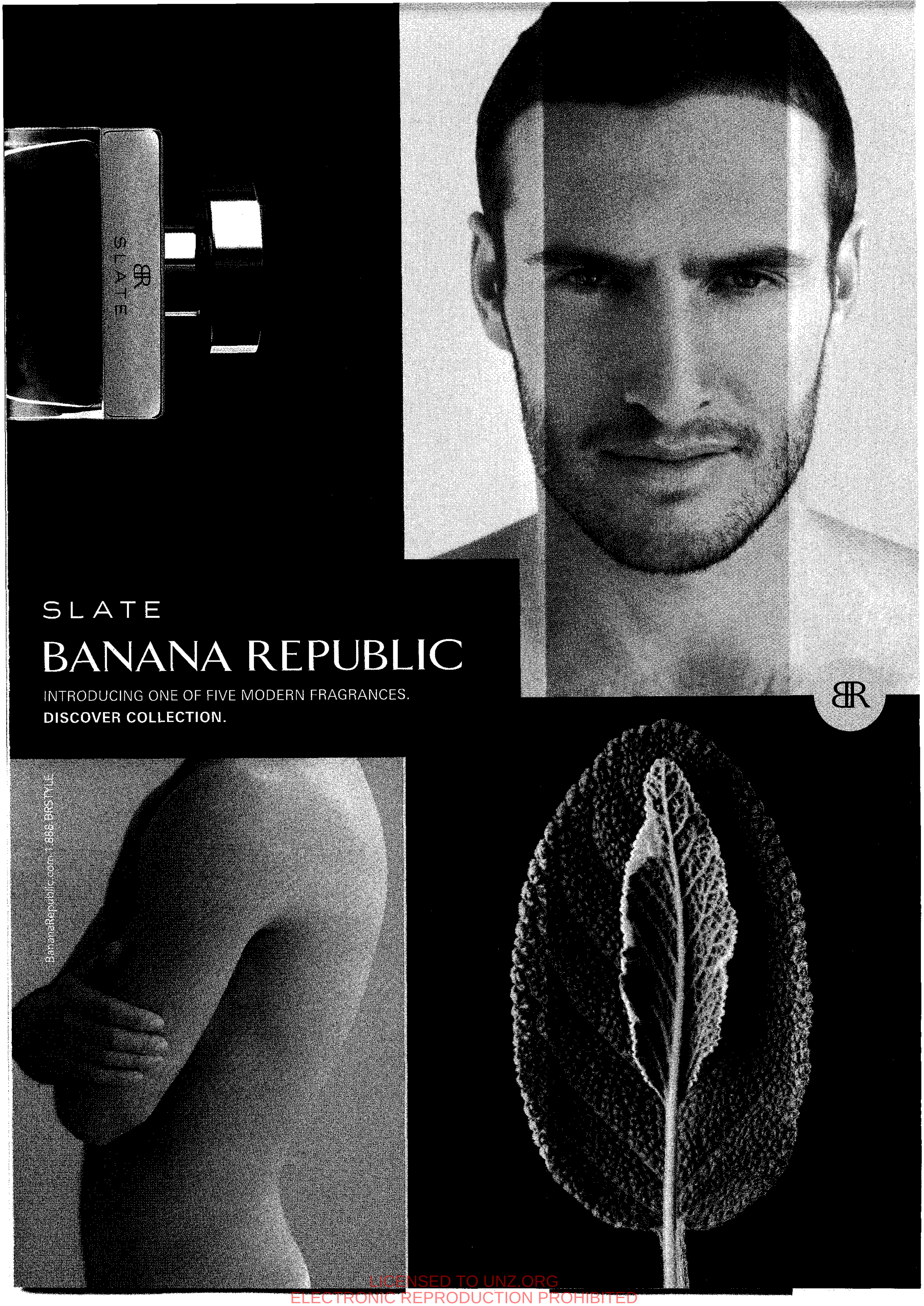

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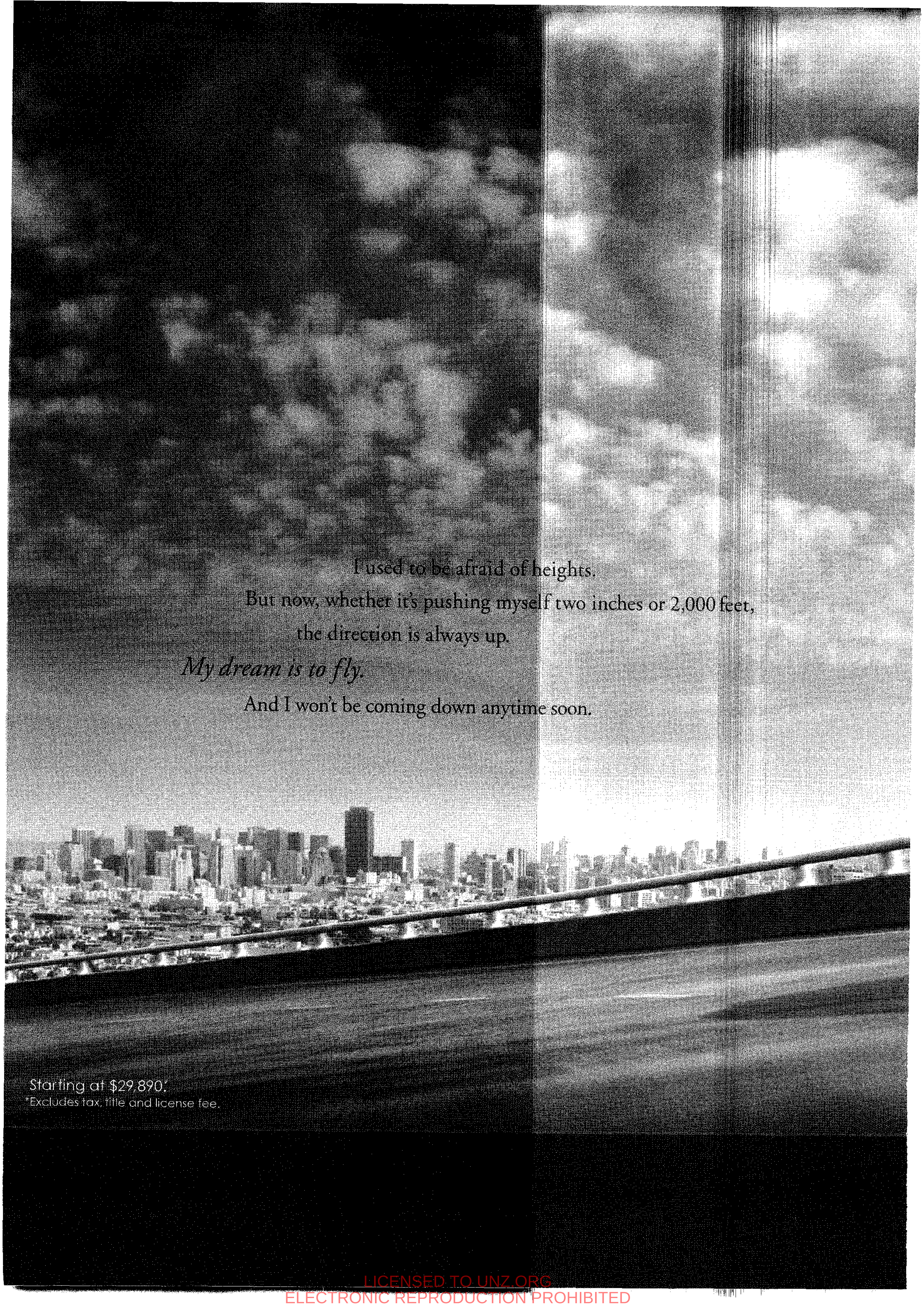
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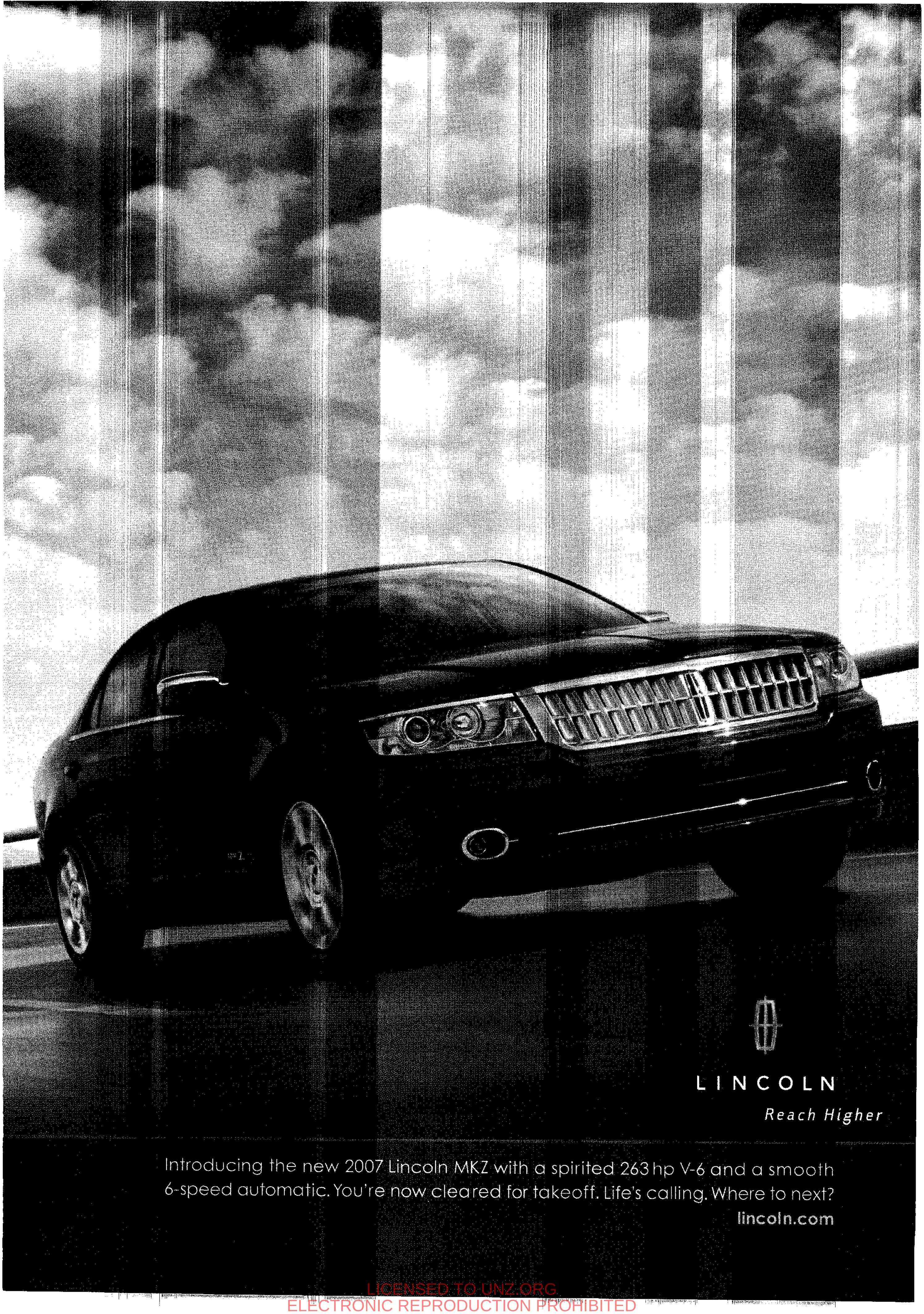
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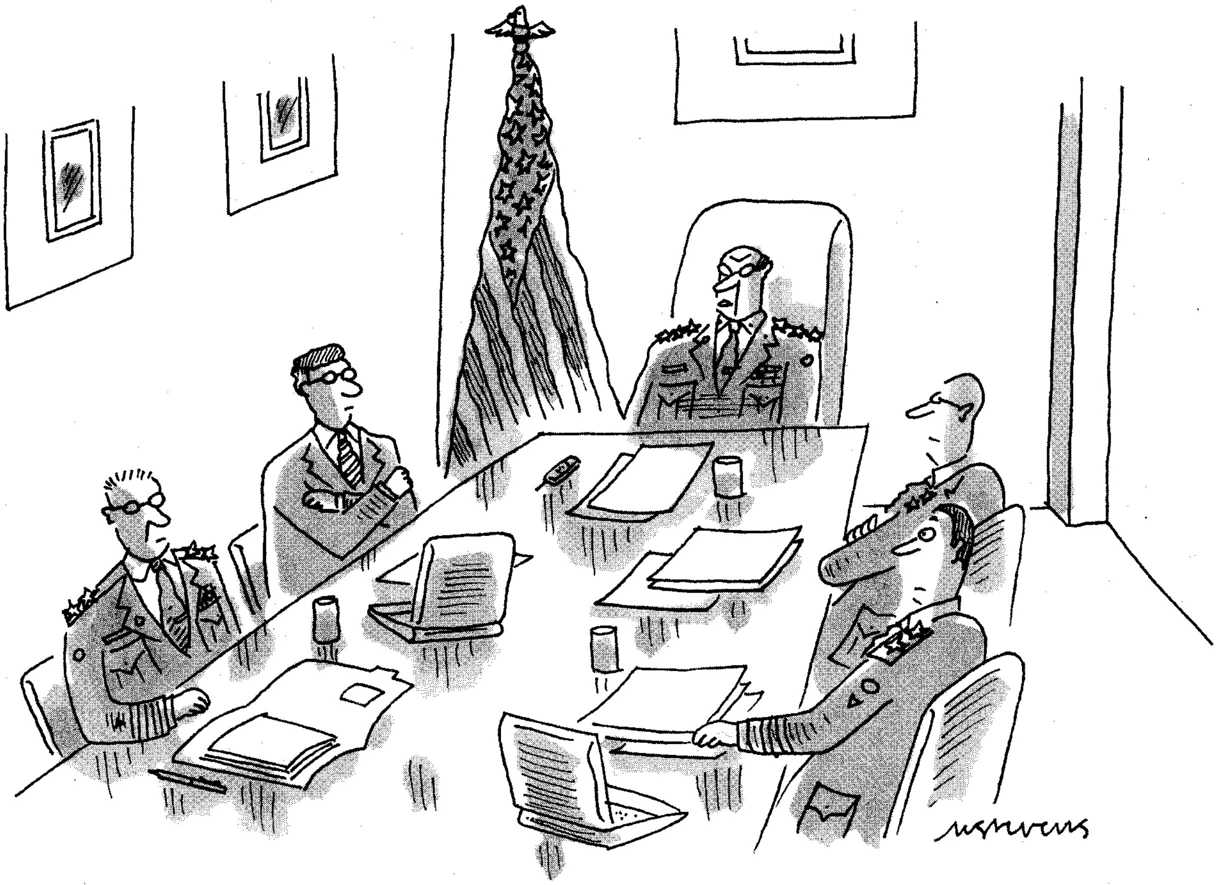
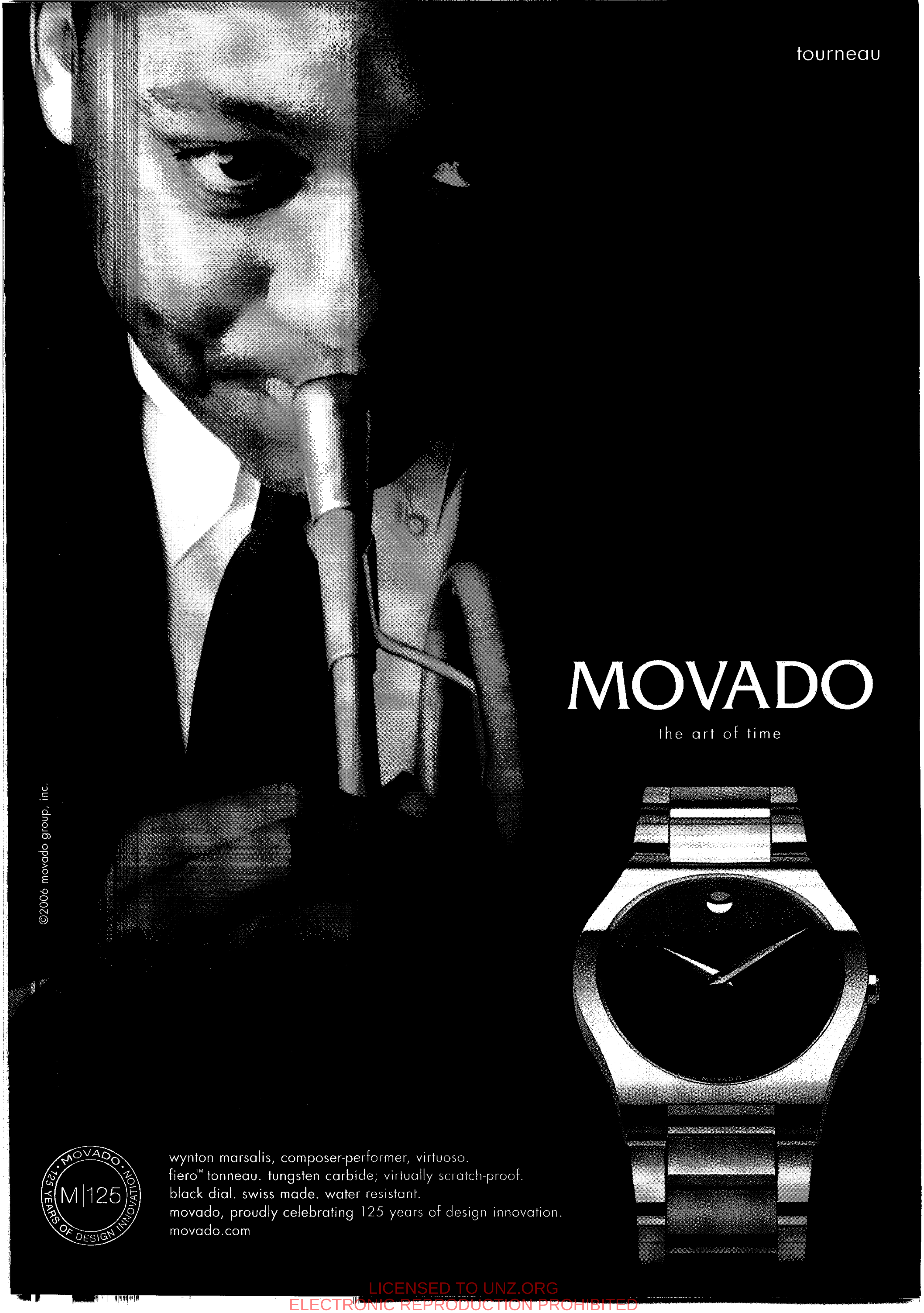
SPOTS *Laurent Cilluffo*



"Who told the press we were having a bad hair day?"



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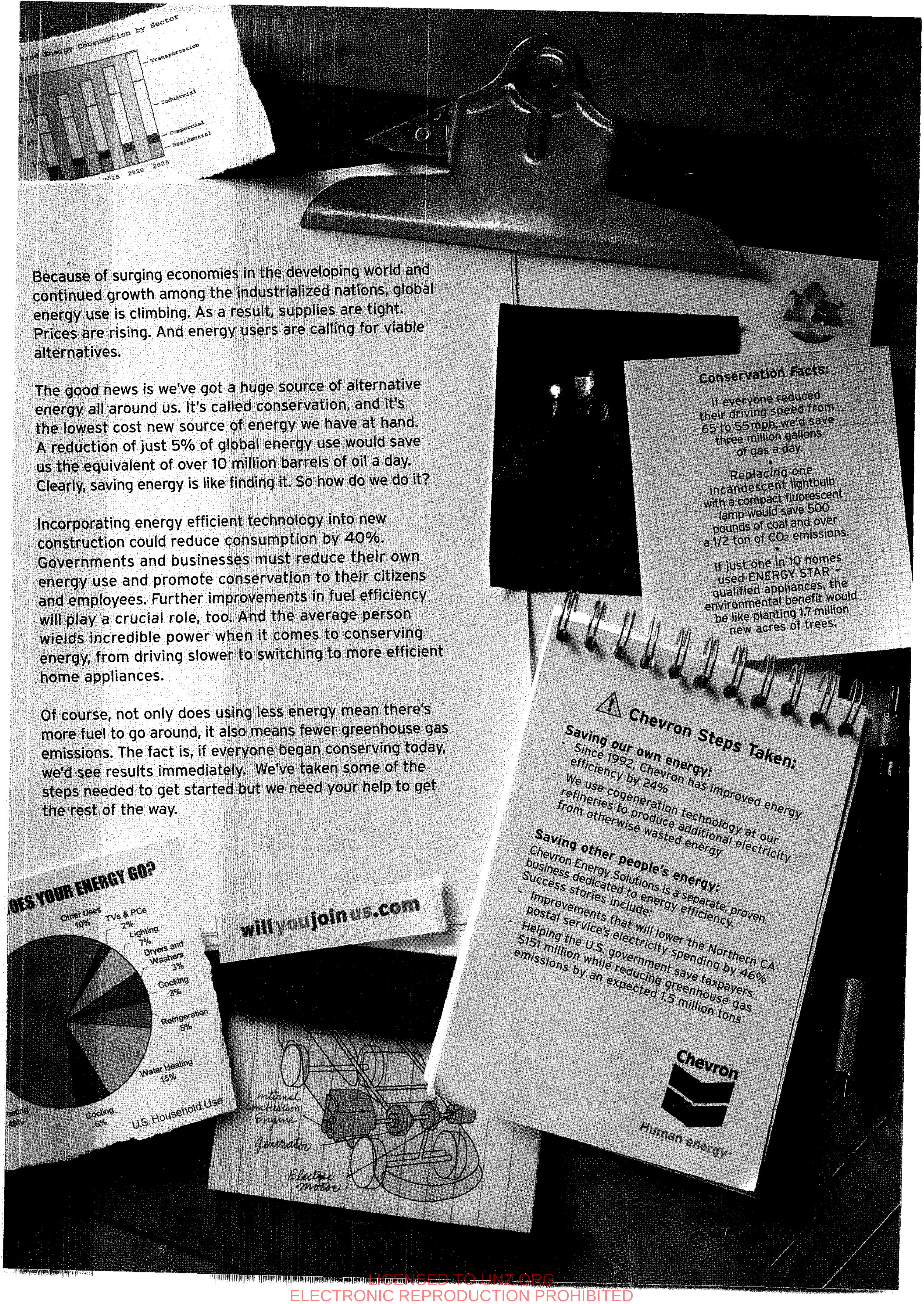
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Industrial
Commercial
Residential
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2020
2025
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Incorporating energy efficient technology into new construction could reduce consumption by 40%. Governments and businesses must reduce their own energy use and promote conservation to their citizens and employees. Further improvements in fuel efficiency will play a crucial role, too. And the average person wields incredible power when it comes to conserving energy, from driving slower to switching to more efficient home appliances.

Of course, not only does using less energy mean there's more fuel to go around, it also means fewer greenhouse gas emissions. The fact is, if everyone began conserving today, we'd see results immediately. We've taken some of the steps needed to get started but we need your help to get the rest of the way.

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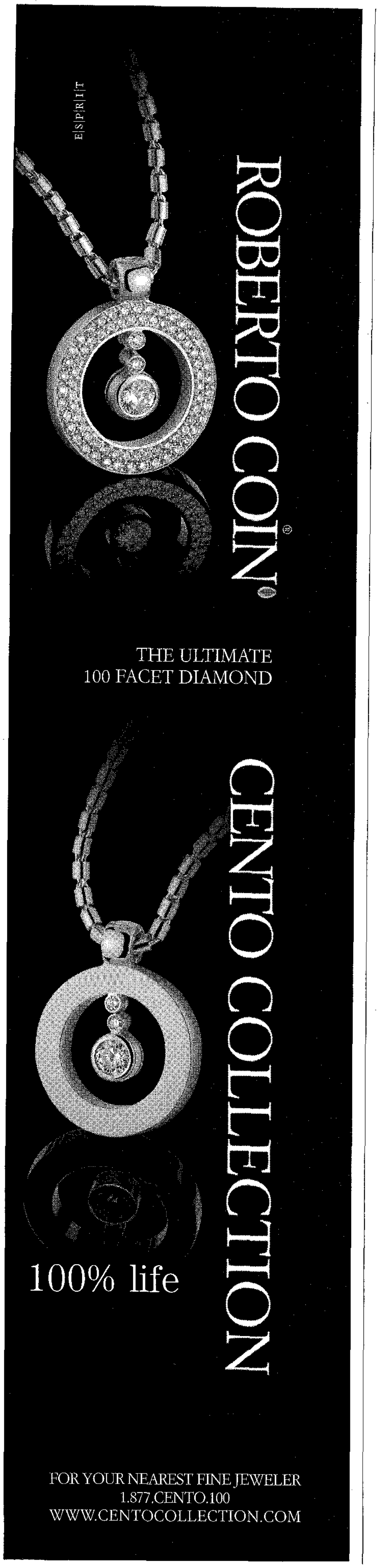
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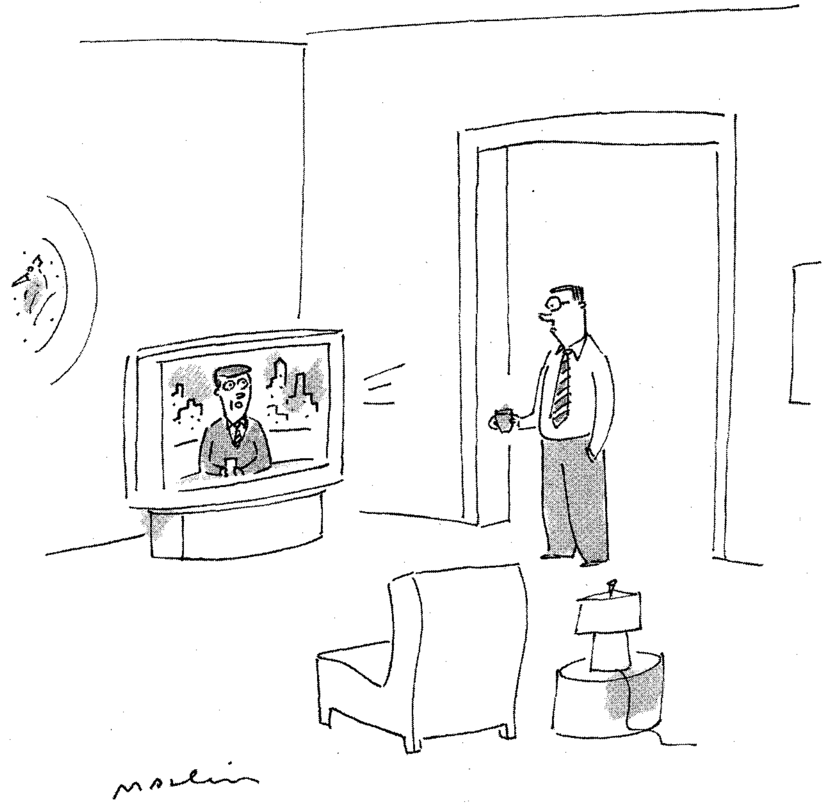
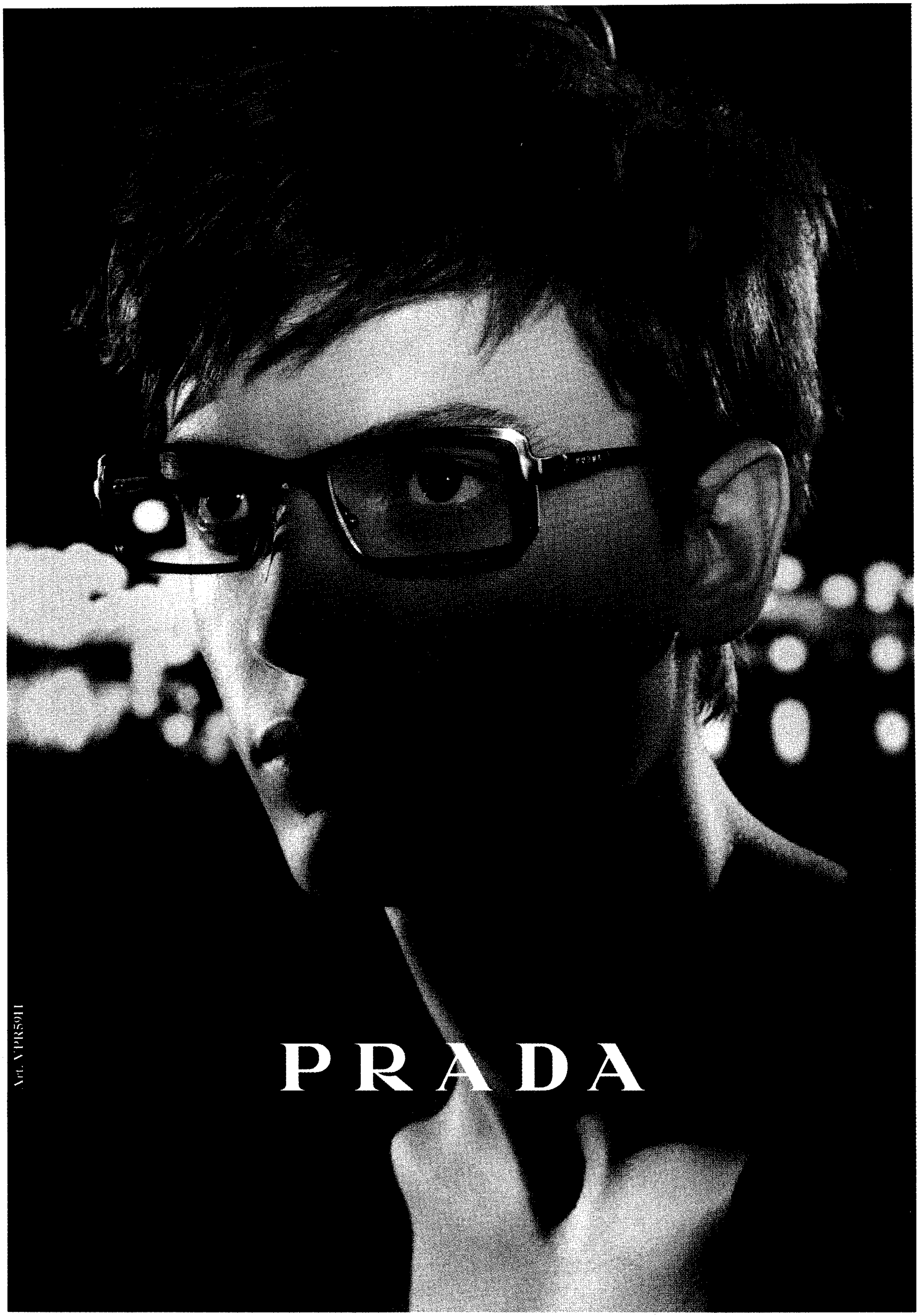
Robert Stone ("Tabloid Days," p. 130), whose latest novel is "Bay of Souls," will publish "Prime Green: Remembering the Sixties," in January.

Thomas Mallon (Books, p. 176) has a new novel, "Fellow Travelers," coming out in the spring.

Richard McGuire (Cover) currently lives in Paris and is directing an animated film. ♦



"Good morning. You'd better sit down."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THE MAIL

BEING BOB

Louis Menand concludes that "there is nothing Dylan likes less than being mistaken for 'Bob Dylan'" (Books, September 4th). Yet all the evidence is to the contrary—the romanticized biographical facts issued as a young man, the notoriously Delphic quality of his interview responses that depict a stranger separated from society, the publication of memoirs most notable for their depiction of a weirdly skewed, if bedazzling, universe. The reason that Dylan wouldn't call his music "folk songs" is not, one suspects, the eclecticism of musical artistry, as explained by the sainted Dave Van Ronk, but, rather, the refusal to apply any label to his work other than the nom de plume that he has so elaborately evolved. Although Menand notes the tradition of invented personas in folk music, he stops short of the most obvious conclusion: that the greatest artistic creation of a man named Robert Zimmerman is the personality known to us as Bob Dylan.
Jonathan Sallet
Centreville, Md.

Menand suggests that the record producer John Hammond's fierce devotion to African-American roots music led him to consider Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, and Duke Ellington "inauthentic." In fact, Hammond's problem with Armstrong was that he traded ensemble playing for soloing instead of finding inspiration among fellow-musicians (in groups like the Hot Fives and Hot Sevens, whose recordings contain his most fervent playing). Hammond famously preferred dance bands to symphonic jazz orchestras, and he did fault Ellington for pursuing sophistication at the expense of feeling. In oddly opposed ways, both men sought to promote racial equality. Ellington did not support Hammond's early call for bands to be racially integrated, as that would entail, Ellington felt, losing players from black bands that were already struggling to survive. Hammond was sympathetic, but continued to push for mixed bands, insisting that the color line made no more sense in jazz than it did in society.
Mark Pruett
Eugene, Ore.

WANNA BET?

James Surowiecki, in his column on sports betting, writes, "How much difference is there, after all, between betting on the future price of wheat . . . and betting on the performance of a baseball team?" (The Financial Page, September 25th). Futures markets in products such as wheat allow farmers and other producers to shield themselves from some financial risks, and thereby encourage the production of necessities. In this sense, the futures markets are more akin to homeowners' insurance or liability insurance than to gambling on sports. But there is no corresponding economic benefit to betting on sports; on the contrary, there are serious costs involved in protecting the sports activities from fixing and other corruptions that invariably accompany such gambling activity.
Douglas S. Robertson
Longmont, Colo.

LEARNING TO EAT WELL

Burkhard Bilger suggests, in his article on school-lunch reform, that solving the problem depends, in part, on finding the money to create a system like that in France or Italy ("The Lunchroom Rebellion," September 4th). But the French and Italian systems work not just because they are well funded but also because they exist within a broader food culture in which dishes like braised salmon with lentils and leeks are not an adventurous or out-of-the-way choice but the kind of dinner that French or Italian people might eat at home. If North Americans generally prefer pepperoni to fresh corn on pizza, why should we expect our children to want anything different?
Roisin Cossar
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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MONEY ON THE MIND

John Cassidy, in his article on the field of neuroeconomics, describes a scenario involving two strangers: one of them is given ten dollars and told to divide it with the other, who is then given the opportunity to accept or decline the arrangement ("Mind Games," September 18th). Researchers have found that people tend to nix such a deal if they stand to gain less than three dollars, a reaction for which the scientists offer a range of explanations. Perhaps one of the limitations of economic theory is that we have yet to figure out how to measure, quantitatively, such things as dignity and greed. When I was young and hot-headed, my boss gave me a bonus for my hard work over Christmas. I tore up the check because I felt I deserved a raise, not a bonus. Once economists come up with a way to calculate the cost / benefit of cutting off one's nose to spite one's face, we will come much closer to predicting how people will act in real-world situations.

Marcy Burstiner
Arcata, Calif.

According to Cassidy, economists have trouble understanding why people, when faced with an even chance of winning a hundred and fifty dollars or losing a hundred dollars, will often refuse the bait. But if you are reluctant to part with a hundred dollars what is irrational about deciding to walk away? For more than two hundred years, there has been a simmering debate in statistics between frequentists, who think that probability can be defined only by comparing the outcomes of many identical trials, and Bayesians, who think that probability can have meaning even for singular, unrepeated events. That debate, still unresolved, goes to the heart of economists' assertions about an individual making rational decisions in circumstances that arise—for that individual—once only. If you play the win-loss game once, you will either win a hundred and fifty dollars or lose a hundred dollars, and no rational meaning can be attached to an average of two mutually exclusive events.

David Lindley
Alexandria, Va.

Some of the decisions, irrational from the standpoint of economists, that psychologists attribute to regions of the brain other than the prefrontal cortex may nevertheless be entirely rational. The decision to refuse a fifty-fifty chance of losing a hundred dollars or winning a hundred and fifty dollars may rationally be based on, in the words of Pushkin, reluctance to risk the essential in an attempt to gain the superfluous. Likewise, the decision to refuse the stingy offer from the stranger on the park bench is not necessarily irrational. Refusing the stranger's offer of a two-dollar share of the ten dollars is ethically correct. If everyone refused to participate in such unfair practices, their frequency would greatly diminish, and the stranger on the bench would realize that only an even division of the money would work.

Michael Jorrin
Ridgefield, Conn.

A PEOPLE'S HISTORY

Caleb Crain, in his piece on Mass-Observation, depicts an enterprise born of the enthusiasms of a few privileged eccentrics in the nineteen-thirties (A Critic at Large, September 11th). While Crain's account ends in the late sixties, Mass-Observation remains a key resource for social scientists seeking out oral history and an organic sense of public opinion. Since its resurrection in 1981, a panel of respondents have written lengthy replies to frequent "directives," often commissioned by social scientists. They have poured out their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on topics including politics, news, sex, gardening, reality TV, family life, and the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. The archive is still housed at the University of Sussex, and employs several full-time staff members.

Karin Wahl-Jorgensen
Cardiff, Wales

•

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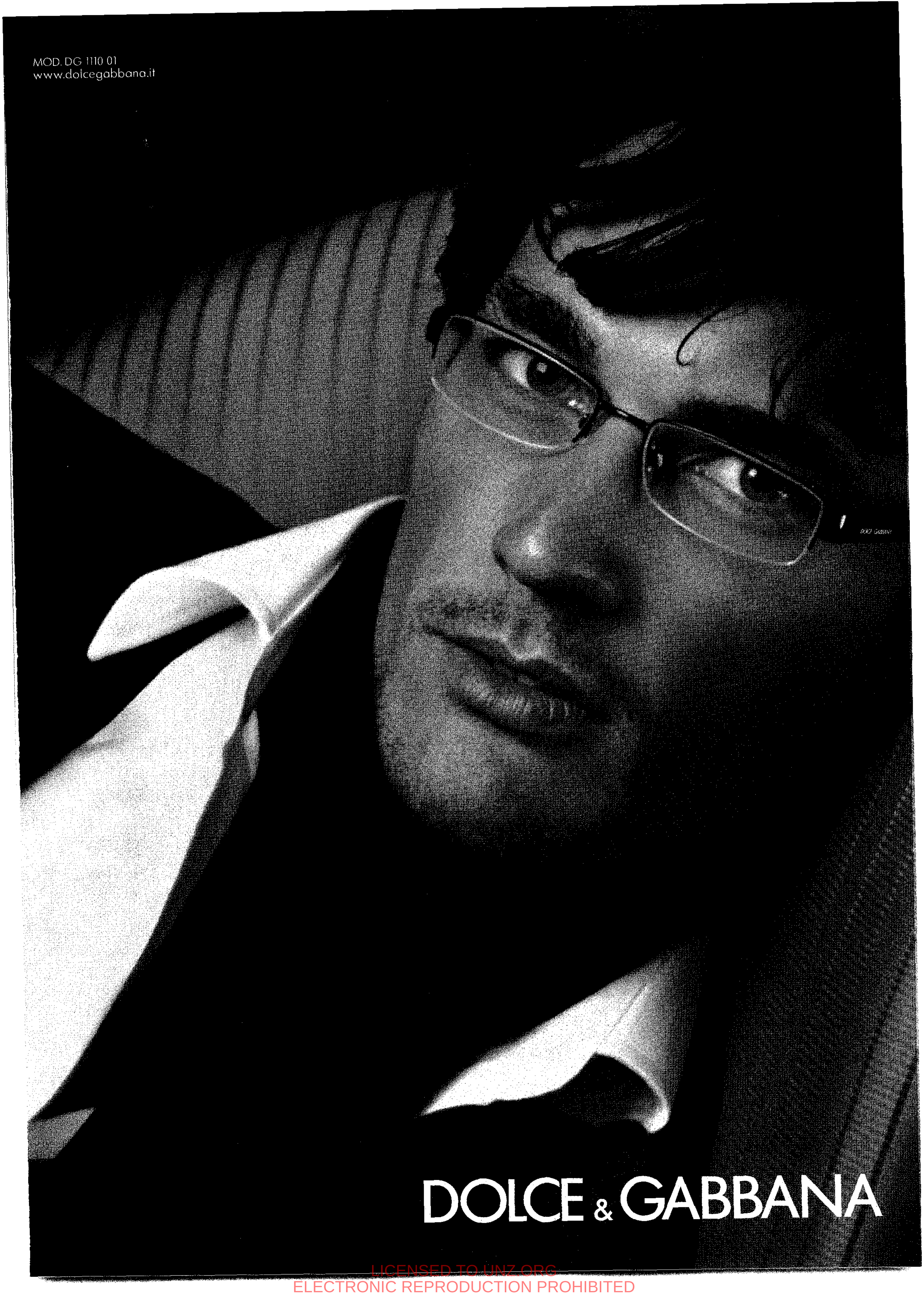
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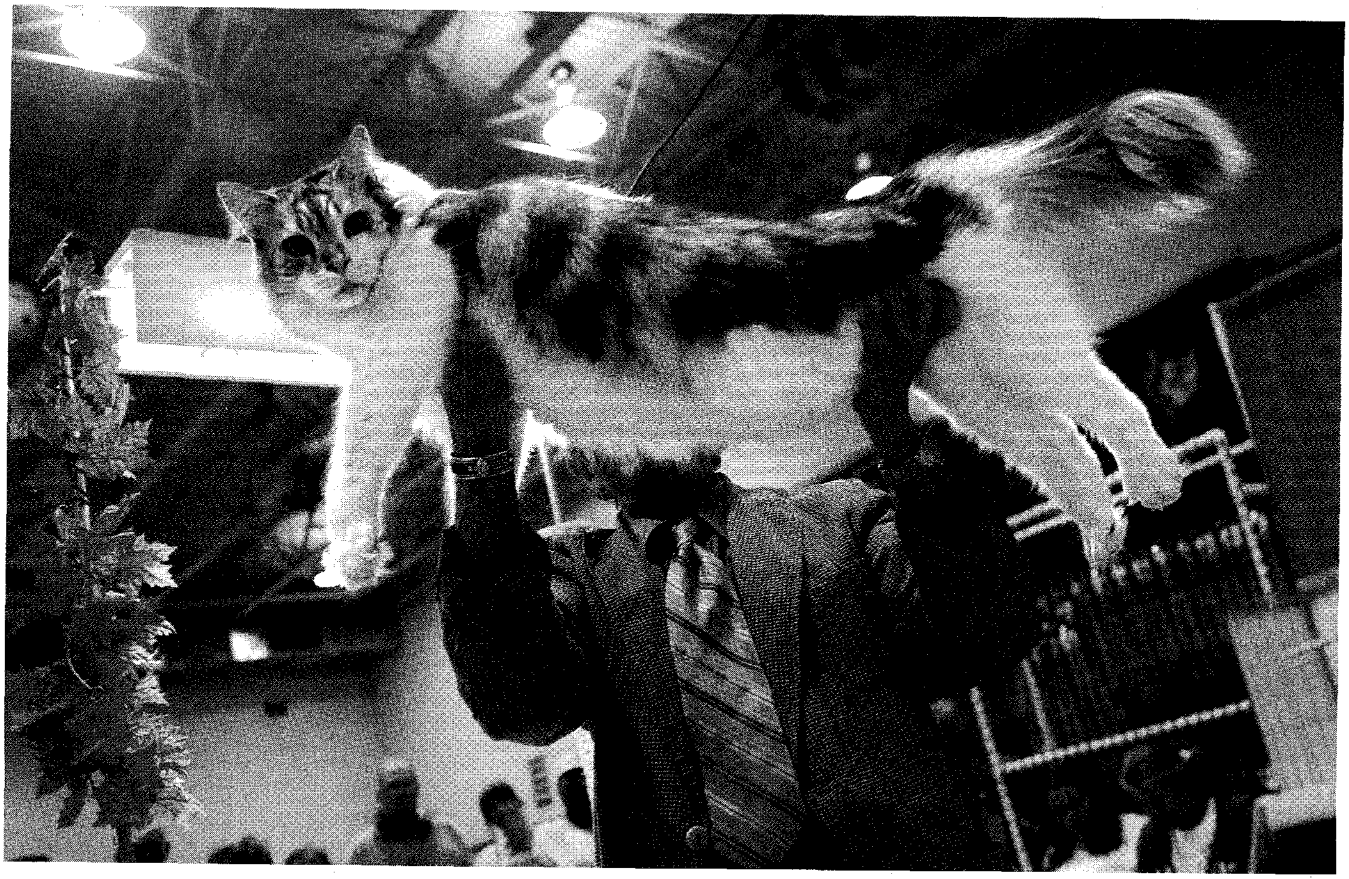


GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
15	16	17	11	12	13	14

THIS WEEK

NIGHT LIFE
BACK IN FOCUS

The English piano player, guitarist, and singer Badly Drawn Boy, who won the Mercury Prize in 2000 for his first album, "The Hour of Bewilderbeast," and wrote the soundtrack for the 2002 movie "About a Boy," pays a visit to the Hiro Ballroom with songs from his new release, "Born in the UK." (See page 24.)

ART
HEARING IS BELIEVING

This week is the last chance to see a pair of notable sound-art shows in Chelsea: Céleste Boursier-Mougenot's wheezy harmonicas-and-vacuum-cleaners project, at Paula Cooper, and the Kitchen's group show of German sound art, "Invisible Geographies." Both merit a visit before they close. (See pages 35 and 36.)

DANCE
HIP-HOP NATION

No choreographer has been more successful in expanding the expressive possibilities of hip-hop dance than Rennie Harris. But he's also devoted to his roots. This week, the showcase "Rennie Harris's New York Legends of Hip-Hop" continues at the New Victory Theatre, and Harris himself performs his self-referential work in progress, "PrinceScareKrows Road to the Emerald City," as part of the Culture Project's Impact Festival. (See page 38.)

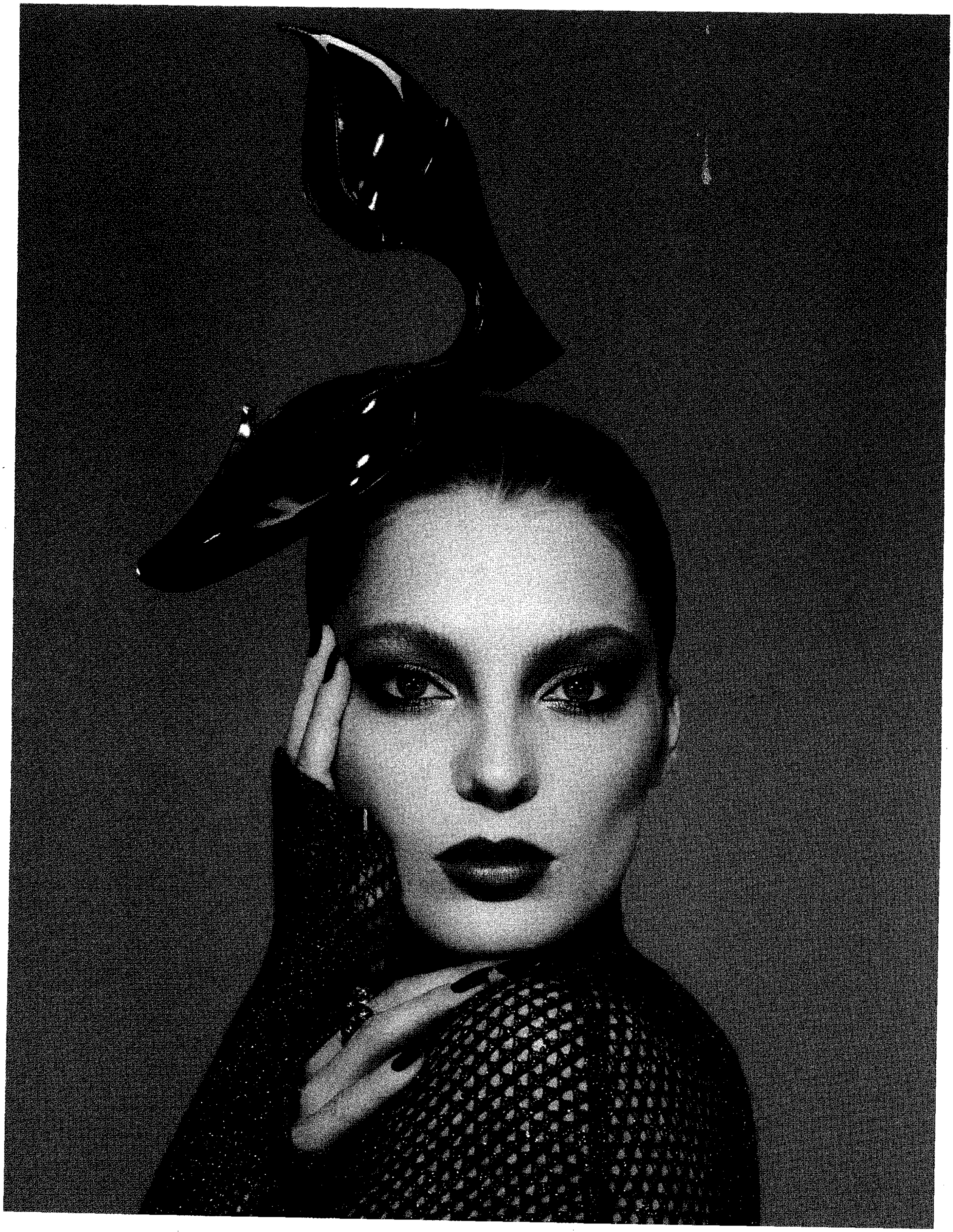
CLASSICAL MUSIC
GREEN THUMBS

The New York Festival of Song, always skillful at blending art songs with pop gems, begins its season with "English Gardens, Earthly Delights," featuring works by Britten, Elgar, Noël Coward, and Lennon and McCartney. (See page 41.)

MOVIES
FRENCH ACADEMY

Since its founding, in 1986, the French film school La Fémis has given the industry some of its leading directors. MOMA presents thesis films from such directors as François Ozon, Noémie Lvovsky (whose "Say Yes, Say No" stars Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, Emmanuelle Devos, and Emmanuel Salinger), and Marina de Van ("Retention," from 1997). (See page 52.)

The Cat Championship will be held this week at Madison Square Garden. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.



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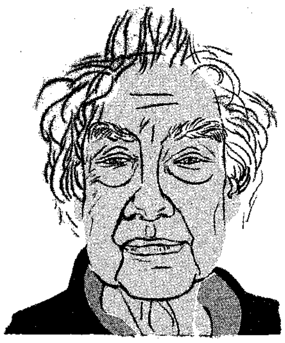
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
OLD-TIME RELIGION

Merce Cunningham's work used to be darker and crazier than it is today. In the old days, as now, he used chance procedures (dice rolling, etc.) to scramble the "narrative" of emotion, but, in certain dances of the fifties and sixties, that just made the emotion sharper—less like a curve, more like spikes. This week, at the Joyce, his company revives "Crises" (1960), which hasn't been seen in New York for thirty-seven years. Four women and one man (Cunningham, originally) wear rubber bands around their wrists, arms, legs, and waists. By slipping their hands under each other's rubber bands, they become entangled. Cunningham's collaborator John Cage called the piece "harsh and erotic." Cunningham himself, a man not given to confessionalism, described it, in his book "Changes: Notes on Choreography," as full of violence. Then, recovering, he said that he wasn't sure how it got to be that way, "except if you have to bend and turn, attached . . . to someone, and they are turning differently from you and at a greater or lesser speed, some kind of violence might occur."



—*Joan Acocella*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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BUTLEY
Nathan Lane stars as a literature professor with a personal crisis, in Simon Gray's dark comedy from 1972. Nicholas Martin directs. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CLEAN HOUSE
A new play by Sarah Ruhl, about a high-powered doctor (Blair Brown) whose housekeeper prefers telling jokes to cleaning the apartment. With Jill Clayburgh. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART ONE: VOYAGE
The first of a three-part sequence by Tom Stoppard about a group of nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals, starring Ethan Hawke, Brían F. O'Byrne, Billy Crudup, Richard Easton, Jennifer Ehle, Josh Hamilton, Martha Plimpton, and Amy Irving. Previews begin Oct. 17. (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

ELLIOT, A SOLDIER'S FUGUE
Quiara Alegría Hudes's drama about a soldier's return from Iraq has a limited return engagement at El Museo del Barrio. In previews. Opens Oct. 12. (Fifth Ave. at 104th St. 212-279-4200.)

EMERGENCE-SEE!
Daniel Beaty portrays forty characters in his new one-man play, in which a modern-day slave ship appears on the Hudson River in front of the Statue of Liberty. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

EVIL DEAD THE MUSICAL
Hinton Battle and Christopher Bond direct this campy musical adaptation of Sam Raimi's horror-film franchise. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

GREY GARDENS
Christine Ebersole and Mary Louise Wilson star in Doug Wright's musical based on the 1975 Maysles-brothers documentary about Edith Bouvier Beale and her daughter, Little Edie, the reclusive aunt and cousin of Jackie Kennedy. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

HEARTBREAK HOUSE
Roundabout Theatre Company opens its season with George Bernard Shaw's romantic drama from 1920, set on an English country estate. Starring Philip Bosco, Swoosie Kurtz, Byron Jennings, Lily Rabe, and Laila Robins. Opens Oct. 11. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

LOSING LOUIE
Matthew Arkin and Scott Cohen star in the U.S. première of Simon Mendes da Costa's comedy, a portrait of two generations, fifty years apart. Jerry Zaks directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 12. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

MARY POPPINS
The smash hit from London's West End comes to Broadway. Starring Ashley Brown as Mary Poppins and Gavin Lee as Bert; Richard Eyre directs. Previews begin Oct. 14. (New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4747.)

MIMI LE DUCK
Eartha Kitt is featured in a new musical, with book and lyrics by Diana Hansen-Young and music by Brian Feinstein, in which a Mormon housewife from Idaho leaves her successful QVC duck-painting business for Paris. In previews. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

MY DEAH
The world première of a new play by John Epperson (also known as Lypsinka), a loose comedic adaptation of "Medea" set in rural Mississippi. Previews begin Oct. 13. (Abingdon, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

MY NAME IS RACHEL CORRIE
The American première of a play created from the diaries and letters of the American activist who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer in Gaza. Alan Rickman, who edited Corrie's writings with Katharine Viner, directs. In previews. Opens Oct. 15. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-4100.)

NINE HILLS ONE VALLEY
Ratan Thiyam and the Chorus Repertory Theatre present an epic allegory about the loss of traditions in Thiyam's native India. Performed in Manipuri with English supertitles. Oct. 11-14. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

SOUTHERN COMFORTS
Primary Stages presents Kathleen Clark's drama, in which a widow and a widower fall in love during their golden years. In previews. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

TALE OF 2CITIES: AN AMERICAN JOYRIDE ON MULTIPLE TRACKS
A new play by Heather Woodbury, the winner of the Spalding Gray Award, about the effect that the Brooklyn Dodgers' move to Los Angeles, in 1957, had on three generations. Opens Oct. 12. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101.)

THE TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGIN'
Twyla Tharp conceived, directed, and choreographed this jukebox musical set to the music of Bob Dylan. In previews. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100.)

YOHEN
Pan Asian Repertory Theatre presents a play by Philip Kan Gotanda, about an interracial couple that begins to fall apart after decades of marriage. Previews begin Oct. 14. (West End Theatre, 263 W. 86th St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

ARMS AND THE MAN
At the Pearl, George Bernard Shaw's 1894 satire, about a young girl who romanticizes war. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

BIRTH AND AFTER BIRTH
Atlantic Theatre Company presents the New York première of Tina Howe's comedy, about over-achieving parents trying to impress a childless anthropologist couple with their four-year-old's birthday party. (Reviewed in this issue.) (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

BLUE DOOR
Leigh Silverman directs Tanya Barfield's drama, about a black mathematician who is visited by the ghosts of his ancestors. (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A CHORUS LINE
A revival of the 1975 musical conceived by Michael Bennett, about twenty-four aspirants for eight spots in the chorus of a Broadway show. With music by Marvin Hamlisch and lyrics by Edward Kleban. Bob Avian directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

HELL HOUSE
Les Freres Corbusier and a company of nearly a hundred present their version of the evangelical-Christian take on the haunted house, in which abortions, homosexuality, and other sins alleged to damn one to Hell are enacted. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

JAY JOHNSON: THE TWO AND ONLY
The veteran ventriloquist takes his 2004 show to Broadway, bringing along a menagerie of sassy co-stars, including a monkey, a tennis ball, and a singing dry-erase board. Bob, Johnson's smart-alecky sidekick from "Soap," makes an appearance, as does his original partner, Squeaky, who was deemed too wholesome for prime time by the series' producers. When his dummies are off-stage (that is, in their trunks), Johnson recounts the history of the art form, as well as his own coming-of-age as a ventriloquist. Sincere as these stretches are, the show only comes to life when Johnson's inanimate companions do. Johnson is a craftsman at the top of his game; one wishes he would put his rare and remarkable gift toward more imaginative ends. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

BURBERRY
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JOHN FERGUSON
The Mint Theatre disinters a 1919 play by St. John Ervine, a teary-eyed popular tragedy about an Irish family who are on the brink of surrendering their mortgaged farm to a pitiless landlord (Greg Thornton). The patriarch, John Ferguson (played empathetically by Robertson Carricart), is struggling with a wasting disease that leaves him unfit to work in the fields, but his faith in God's will is undiminished. His daughter, Hannah (Marion Wood), courted by a foolish, cowardly neighbor whom she cannot countenance, is nonetheless considering a marriage of convenience, impelled by her family's desperation to save the farm. The director, Martin Platt, and his cast give a fluent rendering of the characters' rural dialect, but the drama suffers from a staleness that's tough to transcend. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

KING LEAR
Classical Theatre of Harlem mounts Shakespeare's tragedy, directed by Alfred Preisser and starring André De Shields. (H.S.A., 647 St. Nicholas Ave. 212-868-4444.)

MYCENAEAN
Carl Hancock Rux brings to BAM his theatre piece based on his novel "Asphalt" and his epic poem "Mycenae," which explores the cyclical nature of history. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Through Oct. 14.)

NIXON'S NIXON
MCC Theatre presents Russell Lees's play, which imagines a conversation between Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger the night that Nixon resigned from the Presidency. Directed by Jim Simpson. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE
Cynthia Nixon stars as an outspoken teacher in a Scottish girls' school in the nineteen-thirties, in this play adapted from the Muriel Spark novel, produced by the New Group. Scott Elliott directs. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

SISTERS
Family is the one force you can never escape in Declan Hassett's play of bitter reminiscences, which takes the form of a double monologue (both parts delivered in rhythmic Irish brogue by the remarkable Anna Manahan). As she prepares for her seventieth birthday, flinty-eyed Martha, the unlovely elder sister who's spent her solitary life baking tarts and scones, delivers decades of memories, all clotted and soured by envy of her fair-haired sister, Mary, who won their mother's love and escaped their stifling town for a more worldly life in Dublin. Martha's only happiness was her adoring father, the first and last man to cherish her. When Mary appears onstage, she reveals the lacunae that Martha never sensed, making it clear that childhood jealousy leaves no one's sanity intact. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Oct. 15.)

SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER
This play by Ariel Dorfman, based on the book by Kerry Kennedy, details the plights of more than fifty human-rights activists. Terry Kinney directs. (Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100.)

SUBURBIA
In Eric Bogosian's 1994 play (now in revival, in an updated version, at the Second Stage), Buff (the exceptional Kieran Culkin), Tim (Peter Scanavino), and Jeff (Daniel Eric Gold) are a gang of post-high-school boys from small-town U.S.A. who are going nowhere fast. Jeff's girlfriend, Sooze (the great Gaby Hoffmann), can't capture the men's attention with her performance art: they'd rather listen to Tim making derogatory remarks about the convenience store's Pakistani owners. Exhuming "subUrbia" (and trying to update it to a new decade) feels like an attempt, on the part of Bogosian and Jo Bonney (the able director, who is married to Bogosian), to reclaim the territory that Neil LaBute has populated so aggressively. But Bogosian can't compete with his successor; doing so only lessens the value of his own work, which, in its time, had a charm and a purpose. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/16/06.) (307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

WRECKS
Ed Harris stars in the U.S. première of Neil LaBute's latest play, about a Midwestern man who has just lost his wife. Directed by LaBute. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COLOR PURPLE:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE DROWSY CHAPERONE:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100. **ESOTERICA:** DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NO CHILD . . . :** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **THE PAIN AND THE ITCH:** Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Oct. 15. **RICHARD II:** Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101. Through Oct. 15. **SEVEN GUITARS:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. Through Oct. 15. **SONGS OF THE DRAGONS FLYING TO HEAVEN:** HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave. 212-352-3101. Through Oct. 14. **THE TREATMENT:** Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100. **THE WEDDING SINGER:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Oct. 13: **Xiu Xiu,** purveyors of über-complex post-punk songs. Oct. 14-15: Will Sheff, a songwriter of big-sky scope, leads the Austin-based band **Okkervil River.** They address such perennial subjects as lost love and desperation with an uncommonly rich flair. The intricate arrangements mix elements of dark folk, bright Tex-Mex, and gritty rock to match Sheff's pointed lyrics. In a new song the band has been performing on tour, "The President's Dead," Sheff imagines, in a prolix rush, what would happen after the loss of a leader.

HIRO BALLROOM
The Maritime Hotel, 371 W. 16th St. (866-468-7619)—Oct. 11-12: **Badly Drawn Boy.** The boy in question, the talented Brit Damon Gough, is no longer all that young; he's in his late thirties (and a father to boot). He has a reputation for unpredictable, shoddy, and often irritating live performances, but reviews of recent shows abroad indicate that he's had a change of heart. He still wears his signature wool hat and scruffy beard, but he is now, reportedly, delivering tight and impassioned sets of new material from his latest album, "Born in the UK," which comes out next week. It is a wry nod to one of his heroes, Bruce Springsteen, in more than just its title. The collection of songs, ranging from introspective ballads to anthemic rockers, would do the Boss proud.

DVD NOTES
IT'S HARD TO DO

Video releases can allow blockbusters to conquer the world all over again. They can also offer misunderstood films a chance at reëvaluation. **"The Break-Up"** (Universal), which stars Jennifer Aniston and Vince Vaughn as a couple in crisis, was marketed as a raucous romantic comedy in the style of "Wedding Crashers"; though audiences didn't seem to mind (the film grossed $118 million), it suffered with critics. In fact, the film is a romantic downer, a melodrama that borrows (and subverts) the conventions and characters of contemporary romantic comedy.

Vaughn engages his gift for improvised gab as Gary Grobowski, a life-of-the-party motormouth and guy's-guy Polish-American tour-bus guide in Chicago. Aniston plays Brooke Meyers, an upper-middle-class, well-educated associate at a posh art gallery. The couple live together in a comfortable condo, but a stressful dinner with both of their families brings their differences to a head. They break up but continue to share their apartment, and the rest of the film is spent exploring the absurd yet poignant complications.

Vaughn, who co-wrote the story with the screenwriters Jeremy Garelick and Jay Lavender and also co-produced, recruited the director Peyton Reed, whose "Down with Love" was an ingenious neo-classical improvement on the Rock Hudson–Doris Day comedies of the early nineteen-sixties. Here Reed uses a similar framework to devastating emotional ends, invoking Aniston's public mask of suffering and Vaughn's seemingly boundless bonhomie to reflect on the gap between the megawatt personae of Hollywood and the elusive, shadowy realities of love's labors. He exposes the fun-loving, adolescent Gary as an egotistical lout, and the strong and capable Brooke as a prisoner of her own psychobabble. Few recent movies make such plausible use of outsized histrionics—let alone make these self-projections the painful, false-comic point. The DVD features deleted and extended scenes, outtakes, and an alternate ending that go even further in proving the eerily close connection between the actors' roles in the film and the ones they play in the media-saturated real world.

—*Richard Brody*

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Oct. 11-12: The R. & B. and blues icon **Etta James.** Oct. 13: **Earl Scruggs,** the banjo virtuoso and bluegrass master. Oct. 15: The **Commitments,** a soul ensemble with roots in the 1991 Alan Parker film of the same name.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Oct. 15: **Joan Jett** and the **Blackhearts.** An unwavering iconoclast, Jett continues to deliver no-holds-barred, hard-hitting rock. Her new album, "Sinner," is just as passionate as her mid-eighties hits. Oct. 17-18: Brooklyn's own **TV on the Radio,** the latest indie rockers to head to a major label, remain fiercely experimental, with a sound that's a mixed bag of jittery rhythms, angular guitars, and unconventional instrumentation, anchored by Tunde Adebimpe's vocals. The band is currently touring in support of its sophomore album, "Return to Cookie Mountain."

"LET'S ZYDECO"
Oct. 15: The concert series dedicated to the various indigenous musical forms of Louisiana pre-

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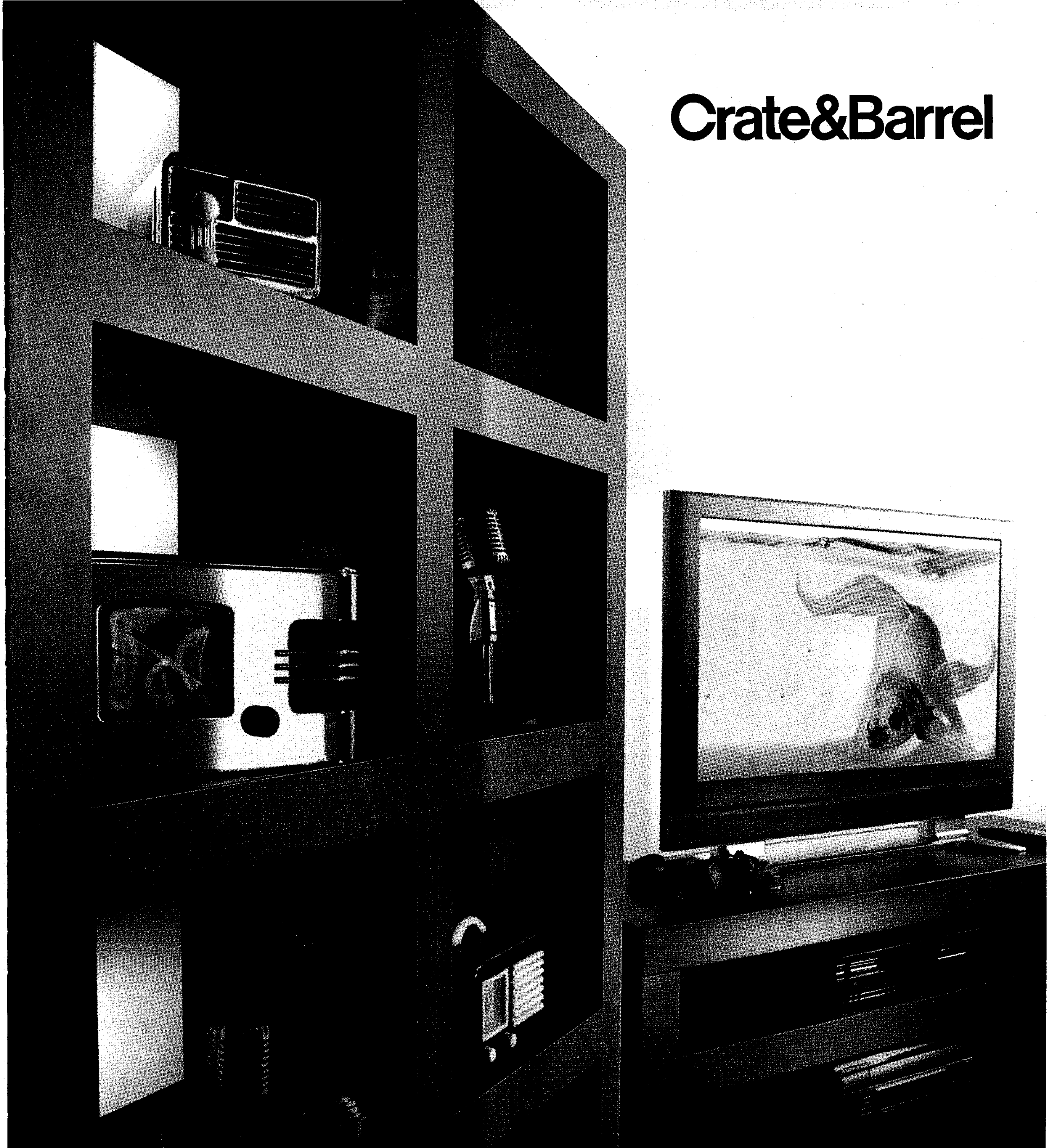


Even if there's nothing great on TV, there can still be something great under it. Designed by an American sculptor, the Shadow Box Tower brings a rich, industrial geometry to home storage. With the same boldness in cold rolled steel, the new Shadow Box Media Stand is a stunning home for your big screen TV. Who knows? Eventually, you may even want to turn it on. Shadow Box Tall Tower, $799. Shadow Box Media Stand, $699. www.crateandbarrel.com

For the store nearest you, call 800 996 9960.

sents **C. J. Chenier,** the son of the legendary zydeco accordionist Clifton Chenier. The piano-key accordionist leads his Red Hot Louisiana Band through a repertory of waltzes, two-steps, and joist-shaking rhythms guaranteed to make dancers kick off their shoes. (Connolly's, 121 W. 45th St. For more information, call 212-685-7597 or visit www.letszydeco.com.)

LIVING ROOM
154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—Oct. 12: **Jenny Scheinman,** the Brooklyn-based violinist and composer who tours regularly with Bill Frisell and Madeleine Peyroux, keeps expanding her horizons. Last year, both here and at the Brooklyn club Barbès, she started singing. She favors the songs she grew up with around the family campfire, from early Dylan and Willie Nelson to Jelly Roll Morton and Mississippi John Hurt. Scheinman, a mesmerizing performer on all fronts, is joined by her longtime friend and collaborator, **Tony Scherr,** on electric guitar.

The indie-rock band Okkervil River, from Austin, Texas, charges into a two-night stand at the Bowery Ballroom this week.

TOMER HANUKA

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Oct. 11: The outspoken entertainer **Barbra Streisand** is on her first concert tour in more than ten years. Oct. 14: **Rascal Flatts,** a trio of chart-topping country singers.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Oct. 12: **Xiu Xiu** (see the Bowery Ballroom). Oct. 13: **Portastatic,** the alter ego of Superchunk's Mac McCaughan.

MO PITKIN'S HOUSE OF SATISFACTION
34 Ave. A, between 2nd and 3rd Sts. (212-777-5660)—**Andy Friedman,** a guitar-toting singer, visual artist, and contributor to this magazine, recently recorded his first studio album of art-edged folk songs, "Taken Man." On Oct. 17, a slew of bands and musicians, including the **Defibulators, Paul Curreri,** and **Devon Sproule,** pay tribute to him and the new release.

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Oct. 12-13: **Jenny Lewis** and the **Watson Twins.** The singer-songwriter Jenny Lewis was the cute twelve-year-old redhead who kissed Ben on "Growing Pains" back in 1988, and that first brush with stardom provides the subject of some of the best songs on her latest CD, "Rabbit Fur Coat." On the title track, she sings in an ethereal little-girl voice about her bitter experience as "a hundred-thousand-dollar kid." One moment, she seems about to break into tears, and the next she's reflecting cynically on her next beer. Lewis uses an actorly control of diction and intonation to fill her gospelly pop songs with personality. She has enlisted the help of the twin sisters Chandra and Leigh Watson, whose timeless harmonizing lends her tracks a sepia tint.

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—Oct. 13: The members of Wisconsin's **Violent Femmes,** now in their second decade together, defy their advanced years and receding hairlines with an ever-youthful approach, punctuated by Gordon Gano's adenoidal whine. Since their eponymous début, in 1983, which paired the insouciance of punk with acoustic instrumentation, the band, like a group of musical Holden Caulfields, has encapsulated adolescent struggle.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Oct. 13: The Maryland pop-punk combo **Good Charlotte** (fronted by the inescapable Madden twins, Joel and Benji) might look like a gaggle of panhandlers from St. Marks Place, but their music is rooted firmly in the food court of your local suburban mall.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Oct. 12: **Vägilased,** a group of graduates of the Viljandi Culture Academy, updates Estonian folk music for contemporary ears. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) Oct. 13: A night of music from northern India, with the sitar master **Kushal Das** and the sarod virtuoso **K. Sridhar.** (Symphony Space.) Oct. 14: **Susan Hellauer,** of the vocal ensemble Anonymous 4, joins the South Indian singer **Aruna Sairam,** the Lebanese-American percussionist **Jamey Haddad,** the Moroccan Sufi vocal-percussion ensemble the **Daqqa of Taroudant,** and others for a celebration of sacred music from the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu religions. (Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall.) (For more information about all the concerts, call 212-545-7536.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

"AMERICAN SONGBOOK"
The Lincoln Center series gets under way for the season Oct. 11-12, with **Audra McDonald.** A lustrous voice and a passion for contemporary song—her new album "Build a Bridge" features work by Nellie McKay, Adam Guettel, and John Mayer—have established McDonald as a model of what a post-cabaret performer can aspire to. (Allen Room, Rose Hall, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500.)

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Oct. 11-14: The extravagantly accomplished, and equally garrulous, saxophonist **James Carter** gets all the space he needs to stretch out in the company of his lean organ trio.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Oct. 11-15: **Jimmy Heath.** Celebrating his eightieth birthday, the legendary saxophonist, composer, arranger, and pedagogue fronts his Little Man Big Band. Special guests include **Bill Cosby** (Oct. 11-12), **Clark Terry** (Oct. 13-14), and **James Moody** (Oct. 15).

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)— Oct. 10-15: The instrumental ensemble **Trio Da Paz,** the vocalist **Maucha Adnet,** and the saxophonist **Harry Allen** and others pay tribute to Stan Getz and Antonio Carlos Jobim.

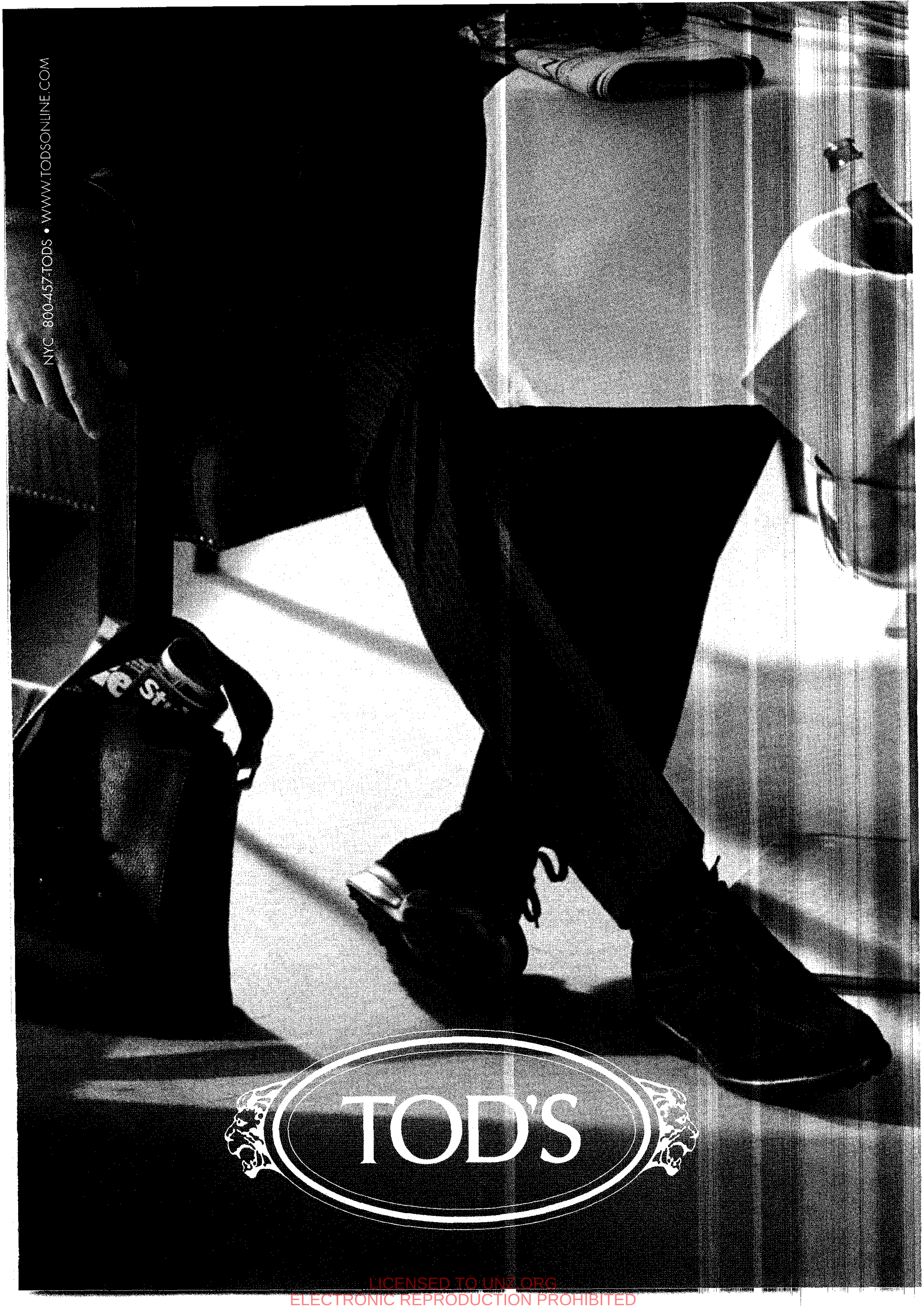
FESTIVAL OF NEW TRUMPET MUSIC
This year's festival closes with an afternoon performance by **Henry Grimes, John Zorn, Andrew Cyrille, Dave Douglas, Steven Bernstein,** and many others to benefit music programs in New York City public schools. (St. Marks In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. Oct. 15. For more information, visit www.fontmusic.org.)

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Oct. 12-13: Long before Latin music attained its current clout, the trumpeter and *conguero* **Jerry González** and the **Fort Apache Band** were mixing jazz and authentic Latin rhythms into a steaming brew that left plenty of room for heated Coltrane-styled improvisations and percussive fervor. The band's key assets are its topnotch soloists, including the versatile veteran pianist **Larry Willis.** Oct. 14-15: A paragon of the art of vocal improvisation since the fifties, **Mark Murphy** transforms standards and signature jazz tunes into his personal property. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Oct. 13-14: The airtight **Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra** gets a special guest it deserves in the rarely seen Cuban piano virtuoso **Bebo Valdés,** who has lived in Sweden for four decades.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Oct. 11-15: If you predicted that the clarinettist **Don Byron** would pick up a tenor saxophone in order to examine the work of the Motown horn man Junior Walker for his current album, "Do the Boomerang," you are in league with Nostradamus. The willfully eclectic Byron will be assisted by the guitarist and singer **Chris Thomas King** in spreading the funk.

MERKIN CONCERT HALL
129 W. 67th St. (212-501-3330)—Oct. 12: **Cecil Taylor,** the grand old man of free-jazz piano. **Mark Feldman,** the most accomplished jazz violinist of his generation, and his wife, the pianist **Sylvie Courvoisier,** a daring improviser in her own right, open the show.



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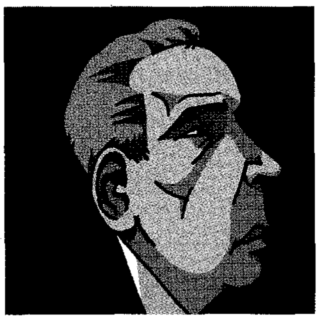
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
LOST SOULS

The most compelling play in London recently was Peter Morgan's "Frost/Nixon," which tells the tale of the talk-show host David Frost's outmaneuvering of the disgraced former President Richard Nixon, getting him to in effect confess to his misdemeanors in office in a series of taped interviews. Who would have thought that the late, unlamented Nixon would start to look good after such a shameful departure from office? Morgan, who wrote the superb screenplay for the current Stephen Frears film, "The Queen," allows Tricky Dick to acknowledge his tragic personal flaws. The British ensemble imported an American theatrical ringer to play Nixon, the majestic Frank Langella, who reined in his charm and physical ease to suggest Nixon's round-shouldered discomfort in his own skin. Langella's Nixon was a cunning combination of cornball and oddball: bitter, humiliated, astute, and vainglorious. When, at the finale, Nixon came clean and a freeze-framed TV image of Langella's jowly, chastened face was projected onto the back wall of the stage, what the audience saw was the lostness not just of a soul but of a nation.

—*John Lahr*



JASHAR AWAN

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Oct. 10-15: The **Brad Mehldau** trio. He's got a brace of current releases, including a new collaboration with Pat Metheny, that fortify his standing as a contemporary piano deity. Still, Mehldau's often glib lyricism hasn't won over the skeptics quite yet. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant-Garde."** The Parisian gallerist Vollard (1866-1939) was an early champion of Matisse, Bonnard, van Gogh, Gauguin, Derain, and many others; this unusually canted show comprises samples of the work that they made with his encouragement and patronage. The two giants of the show's title are represented with canvases from solo shows that Vollard mounted in 1895 and 1901, respectively. Through Jan. 7. ♦ **"New Orleans After the Flood: Photographs by Robert Polidori."** Through Dec. 10. ♦ **"Cai Guo-Qiang on the Roof: Transparent Monument."** Since April, the roof garden has been home to four sculptural works by the Chinese-born artist. Among them is "Clear Sky Black Cloud," a timed gunpowder explosion that produces a small cloud of smoke over Central Park each day at noon. Through Oct. 29. ♦ **"Rembrandt and His Circle: Drawings and Prints."** Through Oct. 15. ♦ **"Set in Stone: The Face in Medieval Sculpture."** More than eighty portrait heads in gilded silver, marble, limestone, and painted wood. Through Feb. 19. ♦ **"Sean Scully: Wall of Light."** These oils, watercolors, pastels, and aquatints, all from a series made since 1998, concentrate on a repeating motif of wide, brick-shaped bars. The Irish-born American painter favors oxidized reds, warm grays, ochres, and the occasional splash of watery green, and in the darkish side galleries, his works on paper and smaller paintings look like just so much skillful, dutiful, minimalist-inflected post-post-Ab Ex. In the atelier-like main gallery of the Met's modern wing, however, the truly wall-sized paintings begin to shimmer as sunlight animates their color and dissolves their gridded monumentality. Through Jan. 15. ♦ **"Accordions and Harmonicas of the Nineteenth Century."** Through March 31. ♦ **"The Armored Horse in Europe, 1480-1620"** is a one-room show of leather and metal examples from the golden age of the obsolete craft of horse armor. Items range from brutally practical sets made for low-ranking soldiers to more fanciful designs displayed by kings in military parades. Through Jan. 15. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

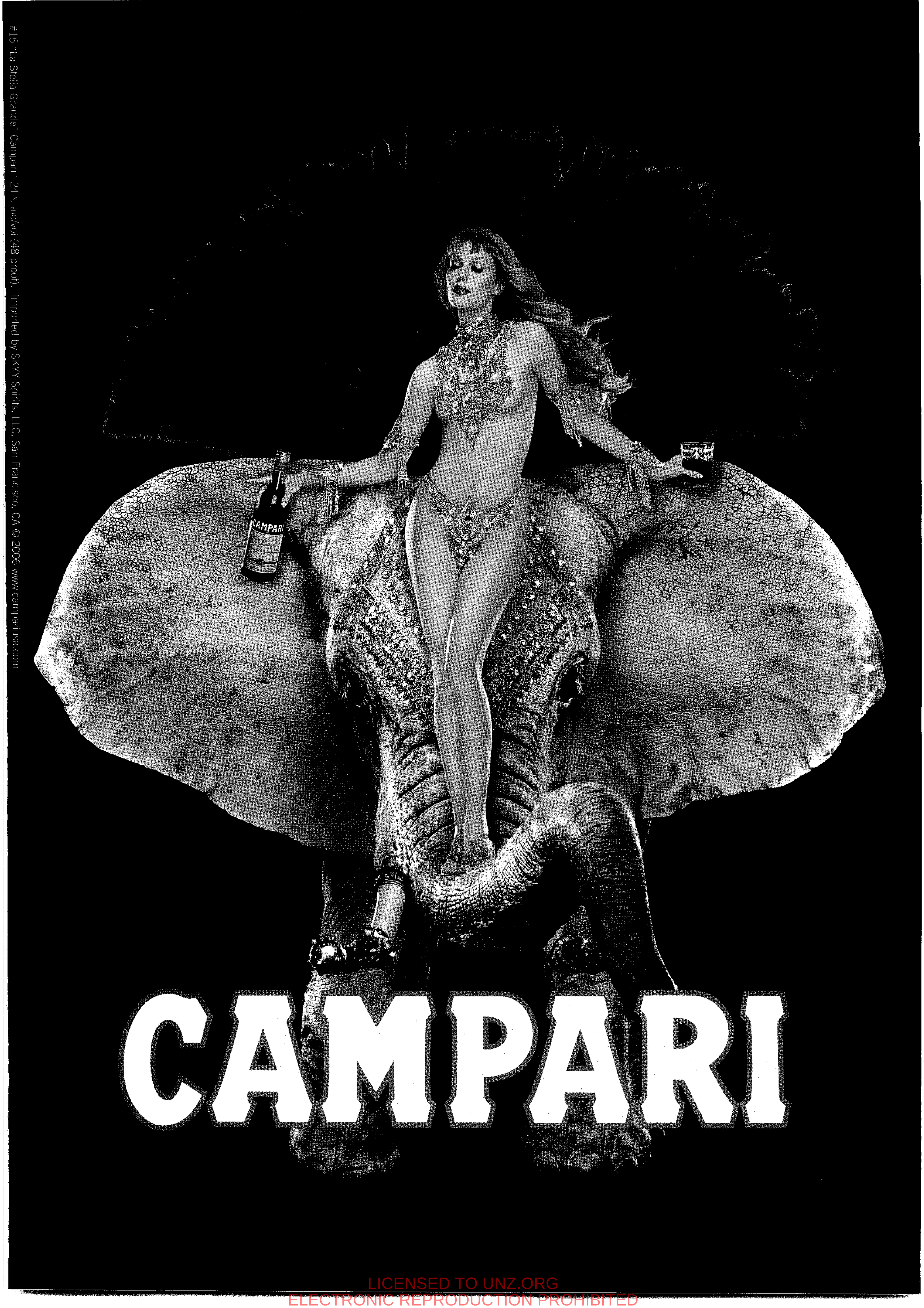
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Projects 83: Monika Sosnowska."** Sosnowska has torn a jagged gash between the museum's second and third levels for viewers to peer through, up into a white-walled space; the floor below is littered with plasticky shards. As an art work, "The Hole" is more a one-liner than a revolutionary gesture, but it's still fun to see Yoshio Taniguchi's precious über-modern temple punctured, just a tiny bit, for the sake of art. Through Nov. 27. ♦ **"New Photography 2006: Jonathan Monk, Barbara Probst, Jules Spinatsch."** Through Jan. 8. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—Two bodies of work by the Italian artist (1899-1968) best known for his slashed canvases will be presented in **"Lucio Fontana: Venice/New York."** Opens Oct. 10. ♦ **"Zaha Hadid."** The only Pritzker Prize-winning architect to be compared consistently to an opera singer—O.K., *diva*—takes over the ramps in Wright's rotunda. The installation mirrors Hadid's career, which has often emphasized artistic conceptualizing and imaginary or virtual space over actual construction. Constructivist and Suprematist-inspired paintings, crafted in lieu of elevations and axonometric plans, serve as "testing fields." It's easy to get lost in their weightless, spatial geometries and think, This is architecture? Only after a long trudge up the spiral does one enter the material world of Perspex and foam-core models and photographs of completed buildings, like the Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Art, in Cincinnati. The ascension is complete at the top of the ramp, where she receives the contemporary architect's ultimate reward: designing flatware, chandeliers, tea services, and futuristic kitchen models. Through Oct. 25. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Picasso and American Art."** Through Jan. 28. ♦ Like Sol LeWitts funked up to represent an age of overwhelming techno-competence, **Mark Grotjahn's** drawings are geometric and regular, but they still have room for gestural flourishes. Eight large works in pencil focus on a recurring, off-kilter double fan shape, which shoots from multiple points on a central spine. Two drawings anchor the room with a saturated palette of reds and yellows, while the rest play with various gray scales. The slight asymmetries, along with smirches, scuffs, and visible pencil lines, admit a bit of ghost into the machine, bending mathematical accuracy toward the psychedelic. Through Jan. 7. ♦ Part of **"Full House,"** the Whitney's seventy-fifth-anniversary extravaganza, remains open into the fall, including the Abstract Expressionism on the second floor (through Oct. 15) and the magnificent display of the works of Edward Hopper on the fifth floor (through Dec. 3). ♦ In honor of Steve Reich's seventieth birthday, **"Three Tales,"** a sound-and-video work that he made with Beryl Korot, will be on view through Oct. 15. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—More diverse than mammals, and as ancient as dinosaurs, the squamates, or "scaled ones," have evolved into some eight thousand species. Twenty-five of those varieties strut their amazing stuff in **"Lizards and Snakes: Alive!"** Tree-bark-toned chameleons and electric-green tree boas are a feast for the eyes, while toxic-looking pink-spotted Gila monsters and an immense Burmese python stir the primal imagination. Relevant facts, put forth in child-friendly, hands-on displays, are not only fun but incredible: a ten-inch collared lizard can sprint at sixteen miles per hour; green basilisks can run on water; the frilled lizard's umbrella-like neck ruff can measure a foot across; Madagascan giant day geckos can scale glass walls with the help of tiny setae in their feet, which create temporary molecular bonds to the materials they touch. Through Jan. 7. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—"Scenic tourism" boomed in the later nineteenth century, as a rapidly enlarging middle class—assisted by similarly expanding railroads—amassed the wealth and acquired the taste to travel far and wide to admire nature. **"Frederic Church, Winslow Homer, and Thomas Moran: Tourism and the American Landscape"** tracks the contributions of the three painters in fomenting appreciation for a variety of wonder-sights: Niagara Falls, the Maine coast, Yellowstone, Yosemite. Church's beautiful, proto-photographic gouaches and sketches in colored pencil lead the way, but the collection of ephemera also boasts stereo slides, souvenir dishes, and the guestbook of the Catskill Mountain House, filled with brown-ink signatures heavy with Victorian flourishes. Through Oct. 22. ♦ J. Alfred Prufrock measured out his life in coffee spoons. Others may have used muddlers, ladles, scoops, skimmers, oyster forks, sugar tongs, grape scissors, corn-kernel rakes, or silver ice-cream hatch-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ets—all of which are displayed in **"Feeding Desire: Design and the Tools of the Table, 1500-2005."** Seventeenth-century knife-and-fork sets in personal carrying cases of tooled leather; airline flatware with mod, rounded corners; and a plastic "spoon-o-brush" that can be used for both eating and tooth-cleaning are also on hand. Materials range from sharkskin to Bakelite, and there's a video of silverware being cast in a delicate forge. Through Oct. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

DAHESH MUSEUM OF ART

580 Madison Ave., at 57th St. (212-759-0606)—**"Napoleon on the Nile: Soldiers, Artists, and the Rediscovery of Egypt."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—The work of Will Eisner, Jack Kirby, Harvey Kurtzman, R. Crumb, Gary Panter, and Chris Ware is on view at the Jewish Museum in **"Masters of American Comics,"** an exhibition co-hosted with the Newark Museum. Through Jan. 28. ♦ **"Idol Worship: Video by Ariela Plotkin and Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay."** The transgressions of "American Idol" contestants have always seemed more aesthetic than Biblical. The Book of Exodus is invoked here, however, to remind faithful viewers that "you shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above, or on the earth below, or in the water under the earth." The Canadian artist Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay defies Biblical edicts with a confessional "audition tape" dedicated to the Russian lesbian-chic singing duo Tatu. The Israeli artist Ariela Plotkin tries harder to mesh the worlds of religion and popular culture with a video that draws on Jewish hymns and Roy Orbison filtered through an Orthodox Jewish band called Schlock Rock. In both cases, exhibitionism rather than idolatry is paramount. Through Oct. 26. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 9, and Fridays, 11 to 3.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (212-534-1672)—**"Black Style Now."** Through Feb. 19. ♦ The designers of the historical video exhibition **"Timescapes,"** James Sanders and Jake Barton, drew their formal inspiration for the three-screen installation from Charles and Ray Eames and their spiritual inspiration from New York's patron poet, Walt Whitman. They, too, love the city's bustle and squalor, its "orgies, walks and joys," and the "frequent and swift flash of eyes," which they chronicle with photographs from the museum's vast archives: Percy Byron's images of upper-class families in their drawing rooms, for instance, are contrasted with Jacob Riis's tenement scenes of the same era. Thirty-five digital maps illustrate how bridges, roadways, and trains were engines for urban growth, how the present was raised on the past, and how the varied carols of new immigrants continue to shape our beloved metropolis. Ongoing. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"Italia! Muse to American Artists"** is a modest show with an extensive subject: Italy's influence on American artists since 1830. Academic views of cities and landscapes dominate, like Thomas Moran's 1884 etching "The Gate of Venice," but sketchbooks, bits of ephemera, and oddball works take the exhibition on some unlikely detours. An old Baedeker guide commemorates the advent of mass tourism; John Ross's "Visible Cities" print series riffs on Italo Calvino's "Invisible Cities," in which Marco Polo tells Kublai Khan about the splendors of various cities (all of which turn out to be descriptions of Venice, his home town). And unlike Florence, Rome, or any other site on the grand tour—or next door at the Guggenheim, for that matter—the place won't be too crowded with visitors. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Luminist Horizons: The Art and Collection of James A. Suydam."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

Bronx River Parkway at Fordham Rd., the Bronx (718-817-8700)—With its stately white oaks, ponds of tropical lilies, and beds of late-blooming wildflowers, the New York Botanical Garden is in fine fettle as autumn sets in. A series of extravagant glass sculptures by **Dale Chihuly**—installed among the cacti in the conservatory, floating in the lily pond, or standing alone on a lawn—trace a treasure hunt across the rolling two hundred-and-fifty acres. Favoring hot, acidic colors and faux-organic shapes, Chihuly's objects are too aggressively whimsical to blend into the landscape. In another setting, the overgrown baubles would look tacky, but in the garden, they just evoke the sense of a pervasive creative principle pulling out all the stops. Through Oct. 29. (Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Legacies: Contemporary Artists Reflect on Slavery."** The museum's first foray into contemporary art explores an ignoble history. Much of the work is familiar to art initiates: Betye Saar's assemblages using racist Americana-memorabilia, Carrie Mae Weems's photoconceptual arrangements, Glenn Ligon's word paintings, Kara Walker's ever-effective silhouettes. Fred Wilson revisits the formula of his famous 1992 exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society, which employed objects from the collection to critique history and institutions. (The installation here couples marble busts of George Washington with a tobacco-shop figurine of an African-American man.) Context is everything, and this gathering of works, in this setting, offers a complex critique both of monolithic historical narratives and the ways in which American slavery has gone largely unaddressed in official and public venues. Through Jan. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

NOGUCHI MUSEUM

9-01 33rd Rd., at Vernon Blvd., Long Island City (718-204-7088)—**"Best of Friends: R. Buckminster Fuller and Isamu Noguchi."** Through Oct. 15. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Ron Gorchov: Double Trouble."** Gorchov comes from the sixties school of post-minimalist thinking wherein it's O.K. to combine mocking, hippie irreverence for "official" art issues with actual, serious considerations of them. In his case, the issue is the divide between painting and sculpture, broached with austerity by Donald Judd and playful jocularity by Richard Tuttle (and, of course, by Frank Stella, who falls somewhere in between). This survey of Gorchov's recent career shows he's remained true to the cause, probing the boundaries of painting and sculpture with a mind toward merging them. Given their placement on walls, and despite their signature sculptural convex/concave saddle/shield shape, his works lean more toward painting, although his single-mindedness with regard to the 2-D versus 3-D problem becomes, at times, a little stultifying. Through Nov. 20. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—Visions of flight are common to all cultures. But in the Himalayas, topography alone viscerally suggests soaring into the sublime. Airborne Buddhist deities from Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan—uplifted on wings, levitating in seated meditation, and buoyed by supernaturally billowing robes—are the focus of **"Take to the Sky: Flying Mystics in Himalayan Art."** Garuda, the eagle king of the birds, features prominently, as do floating pairs of entwined lovers, and deus-ex-machina Siddhas coming to the rescue in a genre of tapestry-like teaching paintings known as "Stories of Noble Deeds." Through Jan. 8. (Open Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 5, Wednesdays, 11 to 7, Fridays, 11 to 10, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

SOUTH STREET SEAPORT MUSEUM

12 Fulton St., at Water St. (212-748-8600)—Eugeen Van Mieghem's life (1875-1930) coincided with the busiest years of the Red Star shipping line, and his parents owned an inn in Antwerp near the firm's warehouses. As an artist, he was thus uniquely placed to observe the Eastern Europeans who thronged to the Belgian quays on their way to Ellis Island and beyond. **"Antwerp = America: Eugeen Van Mieghem and the Emigrants of the Red Star Line"** showcases Van Mieghem's sombre, smoky paintings, enlivened here and there with a red cap or a babushka. There are also ar-

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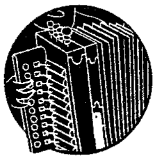
POP NOTES
WEIRD SCIENCE



When "Weird Al" Yankovic first appeared in the early eighties, he was a pop parodist in the tradition of Allan Sherman, refitting the chart hits of the day with lyrics that ranged from silly to sillier—the Knack's "My Sharona" became "My Bologna," Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust" became "Another One Rides the Bus." No one, not even his core audience of worshipful twelve-year-old boys, expected Weird Al to last. But then a strange thing happened: MTV. Weird Al filmed videos for his songs, got them into heavy rotation, and began to absorb as much star power as he reflected. (The best example of this was his symbiotic relationship with Michael Jackson.) The nineties brought diminishing returns, and Weird Al's old-fashioned jestering seemed unlikely to survive an era of mash-ups, MySpace, and other cutting-edge musical technologies. But on **"Straight Outta Lynwood"** (Volcano) Weird Al's loopy pop comedy persists and even flourishes.

Much of the reason for Weird Al's lean years had to do with the explosion of boy bands and gangsta rap, highly formulaic genres that resisted his approach. The new album's lead single, "White and Nerdy," ends the jinx. Reworking Chamillionaire's "Ridin'" as an ode to socially awkward, technologically obsessed white guys is more than a chance for Weird Al to spit out rapid-fire jokes about Wikipedia and "Star Trek": it's a canny reminder that the uncool make up much of the audience for hard-core rap. The other parodies amuse but don't dazzle: "Canadian Idiot," derived from Green Day's "American Idiot," is a good one-liner, but it goes on for dozens of lines, and "Trapped in the Drive-Thru" can't top its inspiration, R. Kelly's epically ridiculous "Trapped in the Closet." More rewarding are Weird Al's originals, which often parody not a specific song but a pop style. "Pancreas" is a sweetly gross tribute to "Smile"-era Beach Boys. "I'll Sue Ya" co-opts the fiery agitpop of Rage Against the Machine. And "Don't Download This Song," the album's closer, is a sweeping ballad à la "We Are the World" that details the evils of music piracy. It is, of course, offered as a free download on Weird Al's Web site.

—*Ben Greenman*

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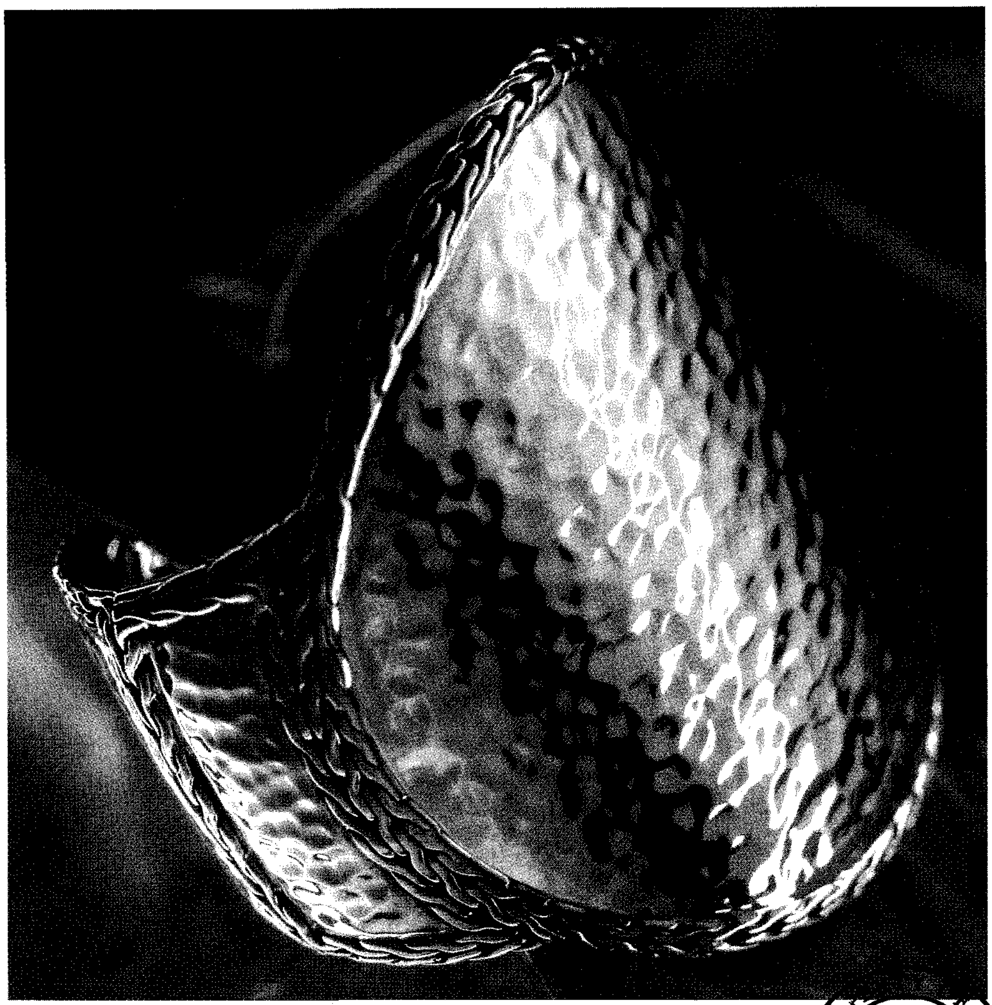

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tifacts from the ships' cabins, advertising posters, and photographs of both fin-de-siècle Antwerp and shipboard life, including a young Albert Einstein in a deck chair and a motion-blurred shot of kids playing ring-around-the-rosy. Through Oct. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—The formal pyrotechnics in **"Quid Pro Quo"** are achieved by the simplest of means: Rashawn Griffin's huge grid "painting" is made out of fragile mass-produced cookies; Karyn Olivier's playground slides are joined at the base to create a kind of sculptural Möbius strip; Clifford Owens collaborates with artists like Joan Jonas to remake iconic performance works. The three artists in S.M.H.'s 2005–06 Artists-in-Residence program don't have much in common, although, for curatorial purposes, the purported theme of the exhibition is a focus on exchange and the gift economy. What they do share is a restless ranging over a variety of media (Olivier's contributions alone look like a group show) and a canniness with materials—everything from wood and steel to lotion and denim—that suggests, among the three of them, they could make art out of just about anything. Through Oct. 22. ♦ **"Nadine Robinson: Alles Grau in Grau Malen."** Through Oct. 22. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6; Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

AMY ARBUS
Arbus, the younger daughter of the legendary Diane, also took black-and-white photographs of singular New Yorkers on the street. The prints here first appeared in the style section of *The Village Voice* between 1980 and 1990, and they're fashion photos of the most valuable sort: pictures of genuinely original, outrageously stylish people. (Including, notably, Madonna, poised for fame in a stained and rumpled thrift-store overcoat.) Arbus worked fast, but her images never feel rushed, mixing spontaneity and formality with an assurance that was deceptively effortless or, perhaps, innate. Through Oct. 14. (Cohen Amador, 41 E. 57th St. 212-759-6740.)

ANISH KAPOOR
Weighing twenty-three tons and standing almost three stories tall, Kapoor's "Sky Mirror" looks like a device for capturing communiqués from the stars. The concave silver dish, measuring thirty-five feet in diameter and made of stainless steel, uptilts toward the gardens inside Rockefeller Center, mirroring back clouds and making an odd though striking counterpoint to the resident golden Neptune and reflecting-pool mermaids. The other face tilts down, toward Fifth Avenue. Below, an ever-renewing knot of gawkers take pictures of their own reflections. Through Oct. 27. (Fifth Ave. at 50th St. For more information, see www.publicartfund.org.)

ANNETTE MESSAGER / YANG FUDONG
In a darkened room, a pile of large inflatables in painted parachute fabric seem to breathe. It takes a moment to realize that the forms—which look like sea creatures—are human body parts: a lung, a liver, a hand, lips. Next door, a host of small clay fetishes are strung in black nets. Obviously, the artist, Messager, is taking on big themes, though response may hinge on one's taste for psychosocial expressionism. Fudong's eight-screen film projection, in the back gallery, is just as interested in questions of impermanence, threat, and beauty. He works, however, in impeccable black-and-white, with actors evoking a swank nineteen-thirties China of slouched fedoras and silk *qi pao,* or mandarin dresses. The slow-burn double take comes with the realization that some of the performers are in drag. Through Oct. 14. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

"HEROINES"
The Metropolitan Opera's new Arnold and Marie Schwartz art gallery opens with a show of works considering the doomed and desired women of "Madama Butterfly," "Orfeo ed Euridice," "Il Barbiere di Siviglia," and other operas. The stellar roster of artists includes Sophie von Hellermann, Richard Prince, David Salle, George Condo, Cecily Brown, and John Currin. Through May, 2007. (Metropolitan Opera House, Lincoln Center. 212-362-6000.)

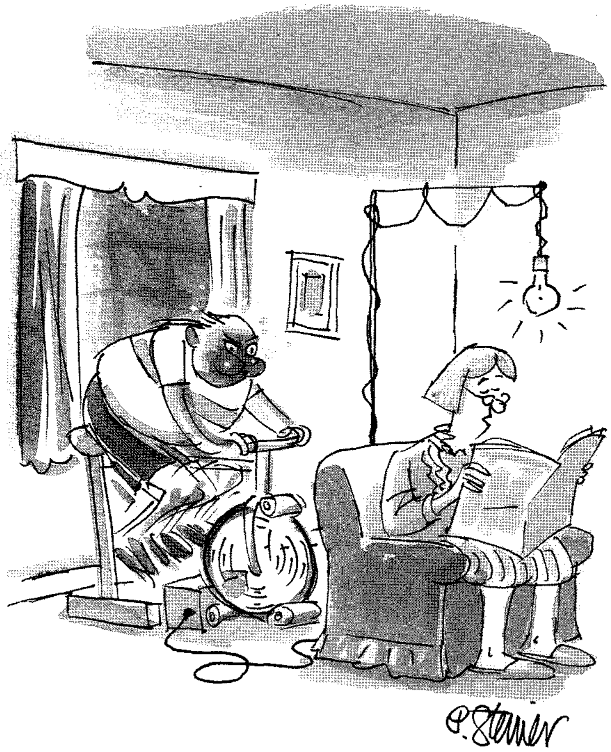
Short List

ELINOR CARUCCI: Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-750-7070. Through Oct. 21. **WALKER EVANS:** UBS, 1285 Sixth Ave. 212-713-2885. Through Nov. 17. **GIORGIO MORANDI:** Thiebaud, 42 E. 76th St. 212-737-9759. Through Oct. 28. **FRANZ ROH:** Ubu, 416 E. 59th St. 212-753-4444. Through Dec. 22. **"VASELINE MUSES":** Skarstedt, 1018 Madison Ave., at 78th St. 212-737-2060. Through Oct. 14.

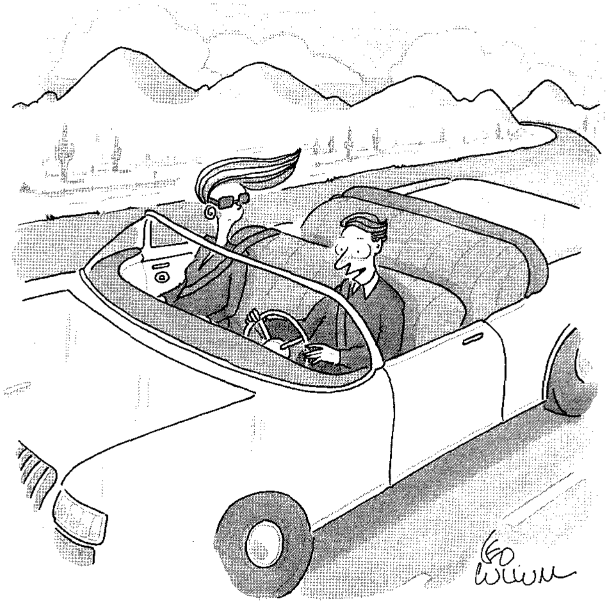
GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DONALD BAECHLER
Some of art's most enduring motifs are given a makeover in Baechler's new paintings. The equestrian portrait becomes a happy, dancing pony. Skulls, the mainstay of Old Master vanitas scare tactics, are repeated to look like Halloween- or pirate-themed wallpaper. Still-life flowers are isolated and blown up—or replaced entirely, in one painting, by a giant ice-cream cone. The most emblematic of art icons, the human figure, is given the royal treatment in a huge sculpture crafted out of plywood, chicken wire, plaster, and papier-mâché. Part cartoon, part idol or effigy,

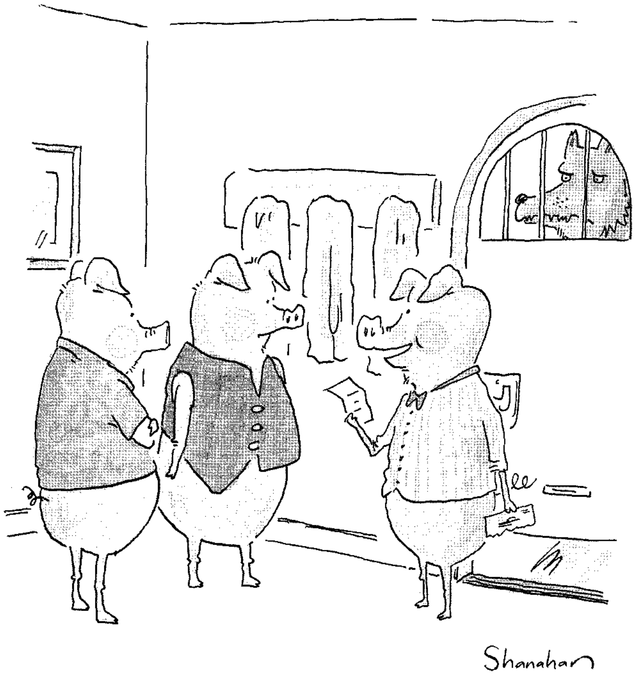
Elinor Carucci's "And If I Don't Get Enough Attention" (2002) is in her show of photographs uptown at Edwynn Houk.



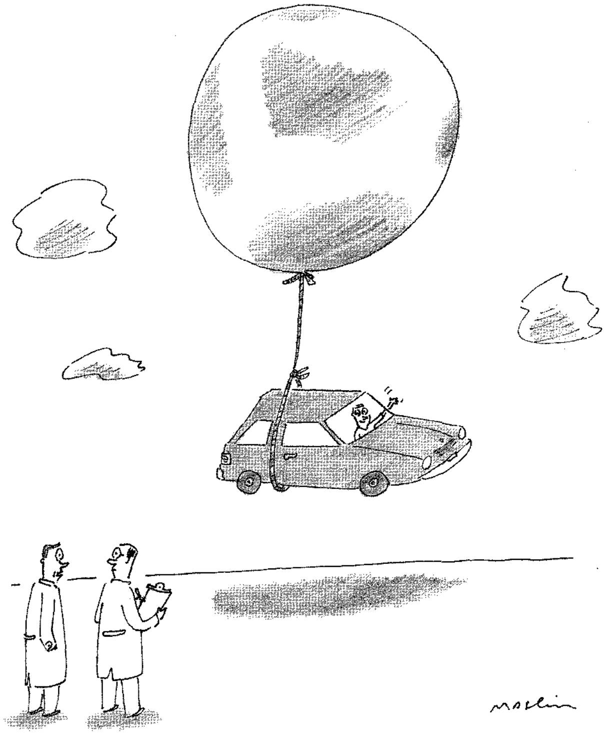
"If you can't get me sixty watts, we'll have to try something else."



"We're almost out of cooking oil. The French fry light is on."



"He can be a real pain, but all that huffing and puffing cut our electric bill in half."



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the work is a perfect demonstration of how all figurative sculpture carries shades of both the tragic and comic. Through Oct. 28. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727.)

JESSE BERCOWETZ AND MATT BUA
Most of the works here are crafted from street debris, massed together and draped with creepy stuff that conjures age, decay, and neglect and carrying twitchy titles like "Young Blood Through the Ages" and "Raising the Dead." A stapled handout details some of their inspirations, from Blue Beard, a serial-killing French con man, to President Harrison's interest in Indian burial mounds. A booklet hanging from a red bungee cord wrapped around a column declares "This is too much"—an accurate assessment for those not enamored of the haunted-house aesthetic, although Bercowetz and Bua do a fine job of creating a horror-vacui sense of unease. Through Oct. 14. (Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411.)

WALEAD BESHTY
The conceptual framework for Beshty's current show (something about transforming the gallery into a modernist hall of mirrors) is so elaborate that it nearly obscures the work itself. Ignore the press release and head straight to the big, handsome photograms in the main gallery, made by repeatedly crumpling and exposing sheets of photographic paper. The resulting black-and-white abstractions look like scattered leaves but have a roughed-up texture that says all you need to know about materiality, ephemerality, and accidental beauty. There's much more of interest here, including a grid of fifty-two appropriated head shots that suggests the dark side of Richard Prince's sleazy "Girlfriends" series, but beware of the theoretical undertow. Through Oct. 14. (Wallspace, 619 W. 27th St. 212-594-9478.)

HAI BO
As China wills itself into the future, it has been erasing its past, both deliberately and through not so benign neglect. Hai Bo's large-scale color photographs of solitary figures moving through the austere landscapes of his country's northern provinces sum up the growing isolation and alienation of Chinese farm life. In another context, eight imposing images of men on bicycles, each riding toward the viewer down an empty dirt road, might suggest grit, determination, and the glory of progress. Here, alongside marvellously moody panoramas that would seem to defy any human attempt to assert control, the bike riders are still heroic, but only because they've survived against such odds. Through Oct. 14. (Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 212-633-6999.)

CÉLESTE BOURSIER-MOUGENOT
It's one of those cracked ideas that actually works: attach a harmonica to the end of a vacuum cleaner, place thirteen of these contraptions in a darkened room, and program them, via a sound-frequency analyzer, to turn on and off at intervals. The result, if you close your eyes, is a lovely, wheezing symphony of sound scattered around the gallery. With eyes open, the work seems a little sillier, attaching itself a little too seamlessly to the tradition of the readymade. (Think Jeff Koons's vacuum cleaners in vitrines—and Duchamp, of course.) Boursier-Mougenot could also use some help with titles. The vacuum-cleaner work carries the overly cute tag "harmonichaos 2.1," and an eighty-one-minute DVD of a slowed-down flame is christened with the cringingly sophomoric "FlameByFrame." Through Oct. 14. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

JEFF BROUWS
Brouws calls his new show of American landscapes (and the book they're taken from) "Approaching Nowhere," but his view of our national wasteland isn't uniformly bleak. That's probably because he delivers the bad news—abandoned factories, shuttered businesses, empty highways, lifeless inner cities—with pained regret and concern. And because Brouws works in color even the dreariest images have a subdued sensuousness: muddy puddles at a superstore construction site, the greenish glow of a highway sign in the fog, the dull gleam of orphaned "Inc" letters on a brick wall. No matter how despairing, the work stops short of the dead end. Through Oct. 14. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 212-989-7600.)

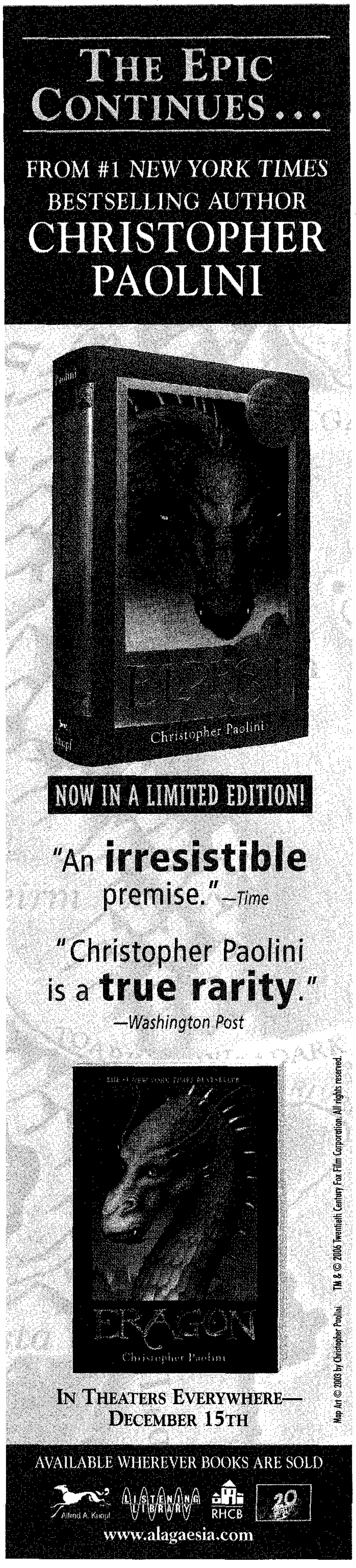
JENNIFER DALTON
Nowadays, information about the art business is circulated and consumed like baseball statistics. Rather than becoming hamstrung by the onslaught, Dalton turns these tidbits into art. A wall of miniature action figures laden with shopping bags details the tastes ("old masters," "contemporary," "tribal art") of prominent collectors. A slide show of graphs and charts asks, "How Do Artists Live?" (Answer: twenty-five per cent get money from their parents; eight-hundredths of a per cent report income from illegal sources.) A case filled with gray rubber bracelets offers viewers a chance to identify themselves as "losers" or "pigs," reiterating how, in the art-plus-business equation, no one comes out clean. Through Oct. 14. (Winkleman/Plus Ultra, 637 W. 27th St. 212-643-3152.)

ISCA GREENFIELD-SANDERS
If Edward Hopper had been a man of the suburbs instead of the city, he might have painted works like these. Greenfield-Sanders emulates the soft, sanded-down look of Hopper's figures and the rigorous compositional architecture, although her vantage points are aerial rather than earthbound. Her works function like back-yard pastorals, peopled with swimmers in pools and loungers in deck chairs looking out over dark, Cheever-esque landscapes. Found photographs serve as source material for these works—a genetic influence, perhaps, since her father is the photographer Timothy Greenfield-Sanders. Through Oct. 14. (Goff & Rosenthal, 537 W. 23rd St. 212-675-0461.)

JOHN MILLER
The veteran manipulator of psychosocial theory and repulsive form, typically in fecal-brown sculpture, lifts his art's terms into cyberspace. Big, glossy photographs of stony or woebegone Los Angeles places are imprinted with bits of text from an on-line dating service. Users call out to ghostly others with careful brags and poorly dissembled neediness. The photos tell of a world that dooms human relations from the start. Also in the show is a sculpted, pie-sliced mound that alternates models of semi-arid hillside and masses of plastic fruit—invoking Miller's sense of all desire as desperate and fundamentally icky. Through Nov. 4. (Metro, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100.)

VIK MUNIZ
Muniz, who rarely fails to entertain and amaze, shows "Pictures of Junk," monumental color photographs of large-scale drawings made with bits and pieces from a recycling yard in Brazil. A video demystifies Muniz's process (assistants arrange barrels, bottles, wheels, stoves, iron pipes, nuts, and bolts into the desired shapes on a concrete court; he directs and records the results from a scaffold high above) but can't diminish the nutty magic of the finished images, each based on famous mythological paintings. Ingres's Oedipus and Caravaggio's Narcissus emerge from and dissolve into a riot of debris in a brave but futile attempt to reassert the power of imagination against modern chaos. Through Oct. 14. (Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2262.)

JOCKUM NORDSTRÖM / YUTAKA SONE / JOHN MCCRACKEN
Three-ring circus might be pushing it as a description for Zwirner's new, expanded space, but not by much. Three white-cube galleries linked by narrow corridors hold what would be, in other galleries, complete shows. McCracken's shiny minimalist columns and planks leaned against the wall occupy one. In the middle are Nordström's faux-naïve drawings and collages, which suggest art-therapy images in which children confide dark secrets about their families. Sone's last installation at the gallery was a rudimentary roller-coaster/slide on which visitors could climb and play. Here he's crafted a fourteen-foot-wide "island" with live plants, mini-rivers, and smoke that pretty much sums up the art-gallery-as-entertainment-spectacle one experiences when wandering through the new Zwirner com-



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plex. Nordström and McCracken are up through Oct. 14, Sone through Oct. 21. (525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.)

ALBERT OEHLEN
Majestic and jazzy, these big new abstractions confirm that Oehlen is the best German painter in the aftermath of neo-expressionism. The pictures deploy a swashbuckling repertoire of forms and techniques—drip and arabesque, slack or snappy doodles, spray-can-fuzzy and hard edges, liquid washes and fragments of figuration, colors ranging from gray mud to magenta and tangerine—in zones stabilized by passages of intensely charged white canvas. Just about anything that can happen in a painting happens in these, with no-problem pizzazz. Oehlen's a master. Through Oct. 28. (Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

CATHERINE OPIE
Opie, one of the most interesting photographers working today, shows black-and-white landscapes made in five American cities between 1997 and 2004. Her models range from Berenice Abbott to Thomas Struth, with classic panoramic views of architecturally compacted but unpopulated streets dominating the mix (which includes four large and startlingly beautiful color shots of Lake Michigan). Images of Wall Street, one with a glimpse of the World Trade Center, have a lovely gravity, but Opie brings the same serious tone to her pictures of L.A. mini-malls, the sort of material Ed Ruscha turned into Pop art. Unpredictable variety has been Opie's strength; that's largely missing here. Through Oct. 14. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300.)

KEN PRICE
Sixteen new painted clay sculptures and abundant earlier pieces and drawings make for a triumphal, exhaustingly pleasurable show of the once underrated West Coast ceramist, now seventy-one years old and living in New Mexico. Price's pedestalled, blobby forms sport many layers of paint, sanded smooth; the funky shapes and ambrosial colors create terrific tension between the carnal and the ineffable. The early work celebrates a long, canny project aimed at comprehending all manner of advanced aesthetics on a small scale, with the handmade quiddity of ceramics as the catalyst. Through Nov. 4. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

MATTHEW RITCHIE
It's always difficult to summarize a Matthew Ritchie installation. "The Universal Adversary" opens with a quote from the Book of Ezekiel ("Their appearance and their work was as if a wheel within a wheel") and involves a series of large, semi-figurative oil paintings on linen, drawings mounted on flickering lenticular acrylic panels, and two film projections—one of which can be viewed from above by climbing a spiral staircase. An arabesquing lattice of black metal hangs from the rafters and frames the suspended film. Ritchie's nervous yet lyrical painterly hand and sepia-ochre palette tie the phantasmagoria together. We might, however, have gotten as much with less. Through Oct. 28. (Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000.)

KAY ROSEN
The Chicagoan Kay Rosen makes some of today's most reliably piquing and pleasing word pictures this side of Ed Ruscha. On walls or paper, one or two hand-painted words or clusters of syllables detonate manifold meanings. "New Orleans" (2005-06) consists of the block letters "OHNOAH" in two reds (one for "oh" and "ah," the other for "no") on a yellow wall; it evokes the hurricane-predicting National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), shouts of alarm, and a plea or reproach to the skipper of an ark. The work's look is solemnly jazzy, like a Big Easy funeral band. Through Oct. 21. (Lambert, 564 W. 25th St. 212-242-3611.)

JESSICA STOCKHOLDER
The ravishing bricoleur, a rococo inheritor of Robert Rauschenberg's Combine aesthetic, returns with new transformations of common stuff: flea-market furniture, plastic buckets, fake fur, nylon mesh, paint, lighting fixtures (lighted), a derelict Corona typewriter. Involving walls, floor, and ceiling, the works register as exploded abstract pictures, poised and mysteriously coherent. They aren't junk sculpture, because nothing in them feels junky. No precious materials could be beautiful in the precise, incessantly surprising ways that Stockholder requires. Through Oct. 14. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

SU-MEI TSE
Old and new and Europe and Asia are brought together in "Proposition de Détour," a huge rug printed with patterns cribbed from a sixteenth-century Persian carpet and cut in the shape of the labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral. The symmetrical, winding circuit is divided into four quadrants, and, on closer inspection, the digitally transferred image of the Persian rug shows fuzzy areas where the original faded with age. Pilgrims and penitents would walk the Chartres maze; for this contemporary version visitors can remove their shoes, sit on the carpet, and contemplate the white cube space of the gallery—or whatever suits them. Through Nov. 4. (Peter Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055.)

SARA VANDERBEEK
VanDerBeek, a downtown gallerist who makes her solo début here, shows disconcertingly elegant, cannily allusive photographs of small-scale constructions and collages. Combining vintage photos, postcards, magazine clippings, fabric, jewelry, branches, and thin metal armatures, she creates delicate structures and layered arrangements that recall Calder and Cornell. The jumble of references—to Greek sculpture, Navajo blankets, Marilyn Monroe—is too scattershot to add up, but that's just fine. The work's suggestive open-endedness is an invitation to the imagination, and a welcome relief after heavy doses of overdetermined art. Through Oct. 14. (D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460.)

"INVISIBLE GEOGRAPHIES: NEW SOUND ART FROM GERMANY"
A subaudible cacophony surrounds us in cities, as each stoplight, A.T.M., and HVAC system beams out sonic waves. For the artists here, this static is material for witty, indexical projects that translate atmospheric noise to visible form. Christina Kubisch offers headphones that pick up electric humming and can be borrowed for walks around the neighborhood. Stefan Rummel registers in trembling silicone filaments the sound generated by the Kitchen's building, and Jens Brand uses a modified iPod to track satellites in orbit and read the earth's topography like grooves in an LP. Best is Jan-Peter E. R. Sonntag's simple, eerie installation, in which the wavelengths emitted from a photograph of the ocean—printed with a faintly radioactive emulsion—are converted first into light and then into sound. Through Oct. 14. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793.)

Short List

ERIK BENSON / AUGUSTO ARBIZO: Roebling Hall, 606 W. 26th St. 212-929-8180. Through Oct. 14. **BARNABY FURNAS:** Boesky, 509 W. 24th St. 212-680-9889. Through Oct. 21. **JESPER JUST:** Rubenstein, 527 W. 23rd St. 212-627-8000. Through Oct. 28. **KAREN KILIMNIK:** 303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Nov. 4. **DARIO ROBLETO:** D'Amelio Terras, 525 W. 22nd St. 212-352-9460. Through Oct. 28. **ALESSANDRA SANGUINETTI:** Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370. Through Oct. 14. **CHRIS VERENE:** Kagan, 540 W. 29th St. 212-560-0670. Through Oct. 28. **"LEAST WANTED: A CENTURY OF AMERICAN MUGSHOTS":** Kasher, 521 W. 23rd St. 212-966-3978. Through Oct. 28.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

ALEXANDER CALDER
There are six works by the perennial crowd-pleaser Calder on view in the Public Art Fund's current installation: five freestanding painted-steel sculptures in City Hall Park and, inside the hall itself, a mobile made of ovoid disks in black steel. Amid the greenery and a bubbling fountain, the outdoor pieces—which date from the late fifties through the late seventies—look like

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TABLES FOR TWO
MOMOFUKU SSÄM BAR

207 Second Ave., at 13th St. (212-254-3500)—David Chang's restaurants share a name with Momofuku Ando, the founder of Nissin Foods and inventor of Top Ramen. But there's little at Momofuku Noodle Bar, other than the basic ingredient, to suggest a deeper correspondence; Chang gives the name only its literal definition on his Web site: "lucky peach." In some ways, despite the utter absence of noodles, Momofuku Ssäm Bar, at least in its daytime hours, seems to more closely bear out the analogy—it's fast, the food leaves a sodium slick on the tongue, and there's a certain retro charm to its budget pretensions (plastic sporks and already worse-for-wear metal trays). But it's not actually cheap, and therein lies the problem: who wants to spend nine bucks on a glorified burrito bar?

Many people do, apparently. One recent dinner hour, there was a steady, if not bustling, line at the counter, where two seemingly dispirited workers glumly assembled the three items on the menu—the *ssäm* (a flour pancake filled with meat or tofu, rice, beans, Kewpie slaw, and a kimchi purée), a rice bowl of similar ingredients, and steamed buns. Late nights, though, are when this place serves the upmarket food that better suits its sleekly modern interior. Chang enlisted Joaquin Baca, his co-chef and co-owner from Noodle Bar, and various chef friends for the kitchen, and Chang himself can sometimes be seen slicing thin strips of fatty ham and cutting open oysters. The menu warns, "We do not serve vegetarian friendly items," and, one recent night, there was a suitably eclectic selection of meats—spicy tripe, a warm, rich veal-head terrine, a delicious pork-sausage corn dog. (Even so, there was also a crisp salad of pickled wax beans and purslane.) Servers are friendly, if occasionally presumptuous—"We've got something fizzy for you," a waiter offered a female diner one evening, pointing to the sparkling wine, "and a beer for him."

Chang has never taken himself, or at least his restaurants, too seriously—at Noodle Bar, he's been known to post "Momofuku's Overrated and Overpriced!" on the door. Maybe, at Ssäm Bar, he'll ditch the daytime shtick and quit telling the same old joke. (Open daily for lunch and dinner and Wednesdays through Sundays 10:30 P.M. to 2:30 A.M. Entrées $8-$16.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

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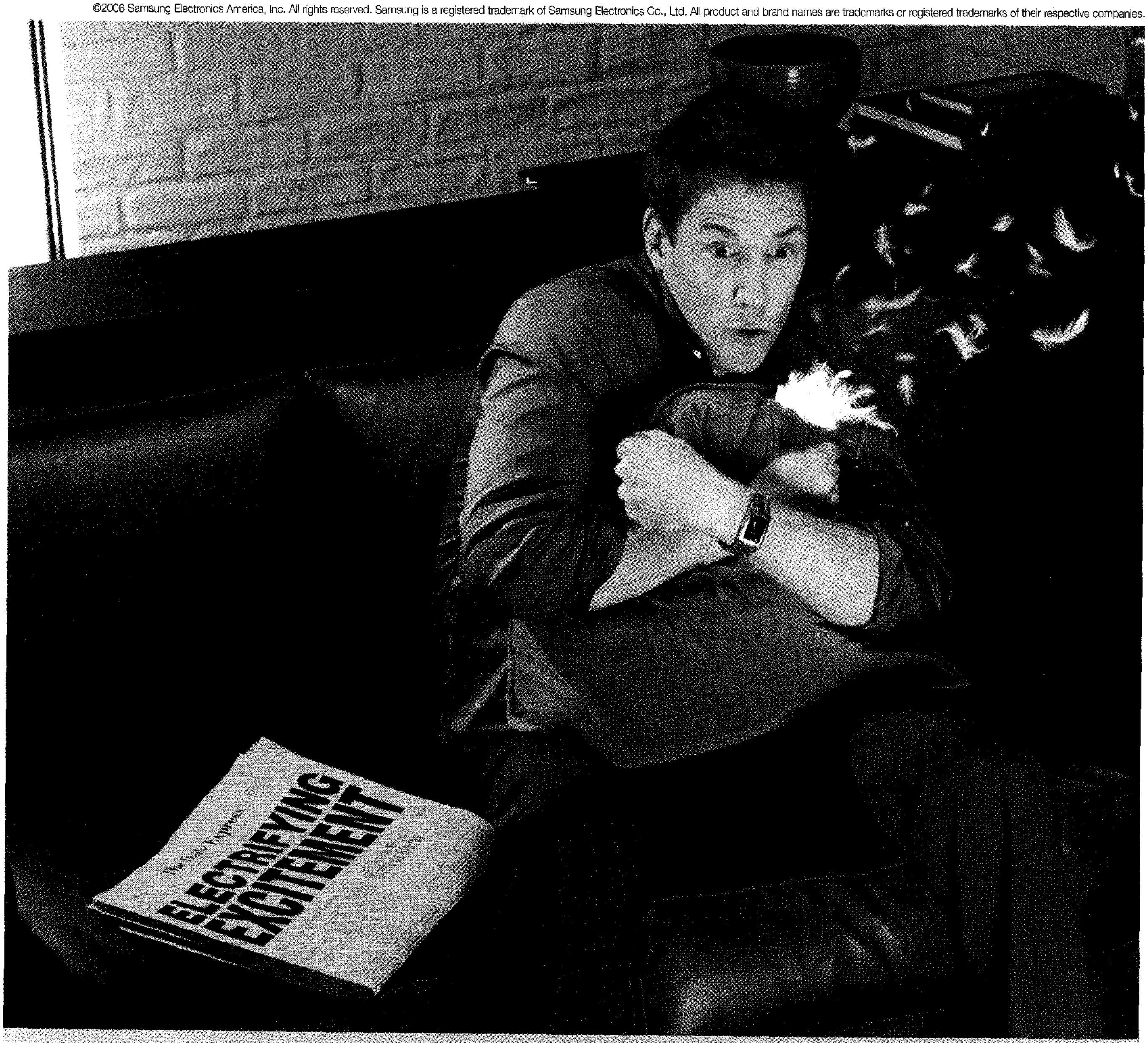

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charmingly abstracted zoo animals. But the mobile is the pièce de résistance, striking just the right outré note in the graceful Federal-style rotunda. Normally, only organized tours are allowed into the building, but a nice police officer may let you take a peek. Through March 18. (City Hall Park. For further information, see www.publicartfund.org.)

DASH SNOW
Snow updates the classic Dada photomontage for the twenty-first century—which is to say, he makes it more graphic, gruesome, and sexually explicit. His assemblages also push the boundaries of the found-object tradition. Where Schwitters and Rauschenberg used cancelled tram tickets and taxidermied animals, Snow works in cigarette butts, hair, old socks, and bones. It's hard to fathom what's gained from his work's aggressive scruffiness, which turns counterculture into a fashion statement. His "Book Fort," constructed from stacks of paperbacks tented with a bedsheet, is more successful; it's a nutty culture that produces titles like "The Pleasures of Cocaine," "Mastering Witchcraft," and "Rifles and Guns of the World's Armies." Through Oct. 15. (Rivington Arms, 4 E. 2nd St. 646-654-3213.)

JANE SOUTH
A Rust Belt, heavy-industry vocabulary of forms inspires South. But her cogs, wheels, grilles, gantries, hooks, and drums seem to have been reconsidered with a set painter's methods and sensibilities and realized as delicate paper sculpture. Cut, folded, and painted in steel grays and oxidized reds (with one dollop of yellow), South's seemingly fragile wall- and floor-based pieces balance or cantilever one part against another. Casting elaborate, crosshatched shadows, they suggest comic-book versions of the brooding spaces under bridges and inside boiler rooms. Through Oct. 28. (Spencer Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 212-334-3455.)

"NEO-CON: CONTEMPORARY ART RETURNS TO CONCEPTUAL ART"
Art history might be described as a string of quotations, citations, and appropriations; "Neo-Con" makes this explicit by gathering recent art that riffs on seminal works by sixties and seventies Conceptualists. Yoshua Okon remakes Joseph Beuys's 1974 performance "I Like America and America Likes Me," replacing the original coyote with a human coyote, a specialist in smuggling illegal immigrants over the U.S.-Mexico border; following in the steps of John Baldessari, João Onofre commissions a vocalist to sing Sol LeWitt's manifesto "Sentences on Conceptual Art" to the tune of Madonna's "Like a Virgin"; Francesco Vezzoli translates Bruce Nauman's "Bouncing Balls" into a glossy porn-kitsch video. The approaches by these young meta-Conceptualists range from reverence to ridicule, but they share one thing: the production values of "Neo-Con" are slicker than those of their predecessors. Also included is work by Jonathan Monk, Mario Garcia Torres, and Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard. Through Oct. 14. (Apex Art, 291 Church St. 212-431-5270.)

Short List

AARON YOUNG: Harris Lieberman, 89 Vandam St. 212-206-1290. Through Oct. 14. **"MOVING PICTURES: AMERICAN ART AND EARLY FILM, 1880-1910":** Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Sq. E. 212-998-6780. Through Dec. 9.

The multi-instrumentalist Don Byron, at the Jazz Standard.

LAURIE ROSENWALD

DANCE

"SPRINGDANCE DIALOGUE"
A collaboration between Dance Theatre Workshop, the Netherlands' Springdance/festival, and Russia's Dance Agency TSEH culminates in a series of performances by next-generation choreographers, many making their U.S. débuts. Dance-makers from Russia, France, Romania, the Czech Republic, Croatia, the Netherlands, and the U.S. have a chance to present work at one of five performances. Part of the European Dream Festival. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Oct. 10 at 5:30 and Oct. 11-14 at 7:30. For complete schedule, visit www.dtw.org.)

MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY
To Merce Cunningham (or his staff), the shuffle function on an iPod must look like a newly popular variation on the chance devices he's been using for more than fifty years. So the company's decision to invite viewers of the choreographer's new "eyeSpace" to listen to Mikel Rouse's score on iPods set to shuffle is both savvy promotion and business as usual. Those without players of their own will be loaned them, and everyone will get more of what matters—the filament of dance Cunningham is endlessly spooling out, regardless of context. "Crises," part of that filament from 1960, gets its first New York showing in decades, with music by Conlon Nancarrow and costume design by Robert Rauschenberg. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Oct. 10-11 at 7:30, Oct. 12-14 at 8, and Oct. 15 at 2 and 7:30.)

"SUGAR SALON"
Susan Marshall & Company headline an evening of new works by four female contemporary choreographers, co-presented by Barnard's dance department and WAX. Marshall's troupe performs an excerpt from last season's "Cloudless" ("Frame Dance"), plus a new work in the same style: that is, with the dancers prone inside an eight-foot-square frame, their movements captured by an overhead camera and beamed live onto a screen. Yanira Castro's newest work examines the mysteries of sleep, Ivy Baldwin Dance unveils sequences from a new dance-theatre quartet, and Dana Ruttenberg, fresh off a two-year stint in Israel, explores the self and identity in the metropolis. (Peter Norton Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Oct. 10 at 8.)

"PUSH"
In the past decade, the French ballet superstar Sylvie Guillem—a protégé of Nureyev famous for her long limbs, pliant frame, and uncompromising character—has struck out in new directions. She has worked with Béjart, Mats Ek, Akram Khan, and, for the past couple of years, Russell Maliphant, a successful British choreographer whose style has been compared to fluid sculpture and architecture. Last year at London's Sadler's Wells Theatre, Maliphant created "Push," a program of four pieces for himself and Guillem, culminating in a dazzling half-hour duet filled with challenging lifts, falls and catches, and plenty of surprising shapes. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Oct. 11 at 7:30, Oct. 13-14 at 8, and Oct. 15 at 3.)

RENNIE HARRIS
For the past year or so, the hip-hop pioneer Rennie Harris has been giving workshop performances of an ever-evolving autobiographical solo called "PrinceScareKrows Road to the Emerald City." Incorporating pieces of his earlier work, the dance looks like an attempt by Harris to figure out where he's going next by retracing how he got where he is—the path from Philly B-boy to esteemed choreographer. Previous incarnations have been exploratory, inchoate, and compelling; the latest version is presented as part of the Culture Project's Impact Festival. (Michael Schimmel Center for the Arts, Pace University. 212-868-4444. Oct. 11-14 at 8.)

"RENNIE HARRIS'S NEW YORK LEGENDS OF HIP-HOP"
Harris's showcase focusses exclusively on local legends, including the Rock Steady Crew, PopMaster Fabel, and the Moptops, joined by eager young hot shots. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Oct. 12-13 at 7, Oct. 14 at 2 and 7, and Oct. 15 at noon and 5. Through Oct. 22.)

"FOOD FOR THOUGHT"
At Danspace Project's semiannual series of curated evenings to benefit the AIDS Service Center NYC, the theme is self-improvement. To kick things off, Miguel Gutierrez challenges provincial downtowners to come see work by kindred spirits from Minneapolis, Chicago, San Francisco, and Brussels. Night two (curated by Wendy Blum) features five pieces that represent major departures or risks for their choreographers, and, on the final evening, Heidi Latsky asks artists to use elements outside their normal repertoire. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Oct. 13-15 at 8:30.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
New choreography by Christopher Wheeldon—featuring Angel Corella, in his Met début—gives a much needed boost to the revival of Margherita Wallmann's 1966 production of Ponchielli's "La

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Gioconda," sung by a strong cast that includes Violeta Urmana, Olga Borodina, Marcello Giordani, and Paata Burchuladze; Bertrand de Billy conducts. (Oct. 11 at 7:30.) ♦ With Aquiles Machado replacing Giordani. (Oct. 14 at 8.) ♦ Gounod's **"Faust,"** with Ruth Ann Swenson, Ramón Vargas, and Ildar Abdrazakov; de Billy. (Oct. 12 and Oct. 16 at 7:30.) ♦ Julie Taymor's dazzling production of **"Die Zauberflöte,"** with Isabel Bayrakdarian, Erika Miklósa, Jonas Kaufmann, and Nathan Gunn; Scott Bergeson. (Oct. 13 at 8.) ♦ In the revival of the Met's lavish (if somewhat creaky) 1982 production of **"Idomeneo,"** Ben Heppner, singing as beautifully as ever, lends the title role the right combination of arrogant force and innocent vulnerability. He is well matched by the mezzo-soprano Kristine Jepson and the soprano Olga Makarina; James Levine's penchant for brisk pacing and rich orchestral sound brings out everything great in Mozart's gripping score. (Oct. 14 at 1.) ♦ A breath of fresh air wafts into Peter Gelb's new Met, courtesy of **"Madama Butterfly."** Anthony Minghella's production is awesome, deliberate, and artfully romantic—no surprise to fans of his films. Characters dressed in richly colored costumes stalk across a black-and-white stage marked by the perpendicular lines that the walls of Butterfly's paper house make against an unforgiving horizon. In the title role, Cristina Gallardo-Domâs plays a weak hand with stunning success, surrounding her surprisingly frail vocalism with dramatic gestures that have the ring of truth; Marcello Giordani gives Pinkerton, the American cad, more style and nobility than he perhaps deserves; Asher Fisch. (Oct. 17 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
Jonathan Miller, who once set Act III of "Rigoletto" in an Edward Hopper-style diner in Little Italy, comes to City Opera to set **"L'Elisir d'Amore"** in another greasy spoon, this time in the American Southwest. Hoping that lightning strikes twice are Anna Skibinsky, Erin Morley, John Tessier, Paulo Szot, and Jan Opalach, who take the leading roles; George Manahan conducts. (Oct. 11 and Oct. 13 at 8, and Oct. 15 at 1:30.) ♦ **"Carmen,"** with Rinat Shaham, Latonia Moore, Mark Duffin, and Adrian Gans; Ari Pelto. (Oct. 12 at 7:30.) ♦ Eric Wolfgang Korngold's **"Die Tote Stadt"** (1920), its music as rich as clotted cream, may be set in fin-de-siècle Bruges, but the story's neurotic mood is very much the territory of Dr. Freud's Vienna. With Dan Chamandy, Susan B. Anthony, and Keith Phares (who offers a gorgeous account of "Pierrots Tanzlied"); Manahan. (Oct. 14 at 1:30. This is the final performance.) ♦ The lively and affecting James Robinson production of **"La Bohème"** returns to the fall schedule with a new cast that features Inna Dukach, Dana Beth Miller, Dinyar Vania, and Robert Gardner; Steven Mosteller. (Oct. 14 at 8 and Oct. 17 at 7:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

DICAPO OPERA: "THE MERRY WIDOW"
New York's third professional opera company mounts a production of Lehár's classy comedy of romantic misadventure, in an English-language version by Wendy Wasserstein; Constantine Kitsopoulos conducts. (Dicapo Opera Theatre, 184 E. 76th St. 212-288-9438. Oct. 13-14 at 8 and Oct. 15 at 4.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Stravinsky's Violin Concerto should benefit from the rich tone and stupendous technique of Gil Shaham; conducting will be Shaham's brother-in-law, David Robertson, a less caloric but equally exacting artist. Also on the program are Mozart's Symphony No. 36 ("Linz") and Violin Concerto No. 2, along with Stravinsky's athletically neo-Baroque "Dumbarton Oaks" Concerto. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Oct. 12 and Oct. 17 at 7:30, Oct. 13 at 11 A.M., and Oct. 14 at 8.)

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Bernard Haitink wraps up his festival of Beethoven symphonies with the superior British orchestra. Oct. 11 at 8:30: The mighty Ninth Symphony—straight, no prelude—occupies the next concert, the orchestra joined by the estimable London Symphony Chorus and the vocal soloists Twyla Robinson, Karen Cargill, John Mac Master, and Gerald Finley. ♦ Oct. 13 at 8: The festival closes with a performance of the buoyant Symphony No. 7 in A Major, preceded by the Symphony No. 1 in C Major and the "Leonore" Overture No. 3. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-721-6500.)

ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
The conductorless ensemble, always at its best with a compelling solo artist, performs an all-Mozart concert (featuring the "Haffner" Symphony and the Piano Concertos in C Major, K. 503, and in G Major, K. 453) with the poetic and persuasive pianist Emanuel Ax. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 12 at 8.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA
The estimable James DePreist conducts the school's topflight orchestra in music by Strauss, Tchaikovsky (the Piano Concerto No. 1, with Konstantin Soukhovetski), and Beethoven (the Seventh Symphony). (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Lincoln Center. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406. Oct. 12 at 8.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA
For the first concert of a season devoted to composer-performers, the adventurous ensemble heads to Zankel Hall to take up new works by the composer-clarinettist Evan Ziporyn, the composer-guitarist Michael Gandolfi, and the downtown composer-chanteur Corey Dargel ("All the Notes and Rhythms I've Ever Loved")—in addition to a piece by the composer-conductor Brad Lubman, who conducts. (212-247-7800. Oct. 13 at 7:30.)

NEW YORK COLLEGIUM:
"MUSIC FOR THE SUN KING"
Andrew Parrott's ambitious early-music band moves to a glamorous location—the Allen Room at Jazz at Lincoln Center—for a luxe concert celebrating the music of Jean-Baptiste Lully, the court composer to Louis XIV at Versailles. Robert Mealy, the superb concertmaster, will take up a *pochette*—a miniature dancing-master's fiddle—to accompany a selection featuring the dancers Carlos Fittante and Caroline Copeland. (Broadway at 60th St. 212-717-9246. Oct. 13 at 7:30.)

GOTHAM CITY ORCHESTRA
George Steel begins the season by transplanting a London tradition—the informal, bargain-priced "promenade concert"—to New York with a program based in the music of late-nineteeth-century Paris: works by Gounod, Chabrier, Lalo, and Chausson ("Poème de l'Amour et de la Mer," with the mezzo-soprano Alexandra Cooke), along with twentieth-century confections by Messiaen and Florent Schmitt ("Psalm 47," with Steel's Vox Vocal Ensemble assisting). (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. 212-854-7799. Oct. 13 at 8.)

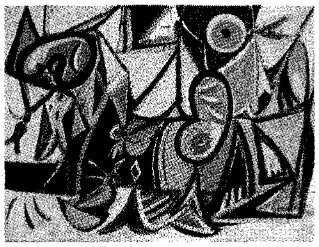
"MUSIC BEFORE 1800" SERIES: POMERIUM
The city's most reliable importer of front-rank early-music groups inaugurates its season at Corpus Christi Church with Alexander Blachly's chamber choir, a perennial favorite, singing "The Seven Sorrows of Our Lady," a program featuring Renaissance works by such composers as Byrd, Palestrina, and Pierre de la Rue. (529 W. 121st St. 212-666-9266. Oct. 15 at 4.)

RECITALS

PETER SERKIN
Bach and Takemitsu would seem to have little in common, but they each wrote music of intense beauty, transcendent spirituality, and formal precision. The consummate pianist takes their music to Zankel Hall in a program featuring Bach's Capriccio "On the Departure of His Most Beloved Brother," along with such Takemitsu pieces as

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
AT THE WHITNEY

"Picasso and American Art," which explores the influence here of the Minotaur of painting, amounts to three shows of differing quality: one pathetic,



one exciting, and one pointless. American early modernizers tremble like tardy pupils in the Master's presence. (Only Stuart Davis, as class cutup, keeps his cool.) Then come the hand-to-hand struggles, as Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning, abetted by David Smith and the less talented but trenchant John Graham, face off with Picasso. You see—and viscerally feel—them working through the Spaniard's daunting styles and gradually finding new ways of painting. Suddenly, Gorky's seething Enigmatic Combat" (1936-37) more than survives the company of great Picassos. De Kooning's breakthrough "Pink Angels" (1945) is like a flag of victory, followed by a ticker-tape parade of Jackson Pollock drip paintings. The final section, of merely sassy Pop art and much navel-gazing Jasper Johns, adds nothing; the game was over. But the show rewards attention. It is rich in aperçus and offers the bonus rarity of one fascinatingly bad Picasso: "Bar-Table with Musical Instruments and Fruit Bowl" (1913).

—*Peter Schjeldahl*

"For Away" and the first and second versions of "Les Yeux Clos" and "Rain Tree Sketch." (212-247-7800. Oct. 11 at 7:30.)

NEW YORK FESTIVAL OF SONG: "ENGLISH GARDENS, EARTHLY DELIGHTS"
Steven Blier serves as pianist and compère for another tour through the art, folk, and pop-song repertories, this one featuring works by such English composers as Britten, Holst, Grainger, and Noël Coward; the singers are Lisa Vroman, Hal Cazalet, and Andrew Garland. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 11-12 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Two longtime society members (including the oboist Stephen Taylor) join such acclaimed young artists as the clarinettist Jose Franch-Ballester and the bassoonist Peter Kolkay in a diverting concert of wind music by Françaix, Poulenc (the Trio for Piano, Oboe, and Bassoon), and Beethoven. (Rose Studio, Lincoln Center. 212-875-5788. Oct. 12 at 6:45.)

STEINWAY HALL: PABLO ROSSI
Concerts at piano showrooms are a growing Manhattan trend. Steinway, which has the grandest of them, will host a concert by this award-winning young Brazilian pianist, who will perform works by Mozart, Prokofiev, Chopin, and Villa-Lobos. (109 W. 57th St. 212-288-3031. Oct. 12 at 7. A donation is suggested.)

DOROTHEA RÖSCHMANN AND GRAHAM JOHNSON
The Metropolitan Opera soprano joins the king of lieder accompanists for songs by Schubert (including "Gretchen am Spinnrade"), Mahler, and Berg (the "Seven Early Songs"). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 12 at 7:30.)

GEORGE LONDON FOUNDATION RECITAL
The heldentenor Ben Heppner, currently plying his trade at the Met, joins an up-and-coming vocalist—the soprano Wendy Bryn Harmer—for an intimate recital at the Morgan Library's splendid new concert hall. (Madison Ave. at 36th St. 212-685-0008. Oct. 12 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
Oct. 12-13 at 7:30: Hamish Milne, a pianist prized by connoisseurs for his intrepid spirit and elegant touch, offers canonical works by Bach, Chopin, and Beethoven (the Sonata in E Major, Op. 109), as well as a rarity by Medtner, four excerpts from his "Six Tales," Op. 51. ♦ Oct. 14 at 7:30 and Oct. 15 at 4: The violinist Mark Peskanov and the cellist Clancy Newman are featured in a robust program of works including Prokofiev's Sonata for Two Violins, string quartets by Haydn and the film composer Miklos Rozsa, and some solo pieces by Newman himself. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

BEAUX ARTS TRIO
The supreme piano trio graces the Metropolitan Museum with a concert featuring two benchmarks of the repertory: Schubert's Trio in B-Flat Major, Op. 99, and Shostakovich's Trio No. 2 in E Minor. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Oct. 13 at 8.)

BROOKLYN CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY
Brooklyn's chamber-music scene, like its real-estate market, continues to expand: this group is led by the violinist Carmit Zori, a former artistic director at Bargemusic. She joins the baritone Randall Scarlata, the pianist Shai Wosner, and other fine musicians for a concert in the chapel of the First Unitarian Church that features music by Mozart, Mahler (songs from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn"), and Dvořák (the Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major). (Monroe Pl. at Pierrepont St. 718-858-0718. Oct. 13 at 8.)

MAXIM VENGEROV, ALISA WEILERSTEIN, AND LILYA ZILBERSTEIN
Three young artists of genuine passion and high expertise—on violin, cello, and piano, respectively—take the stage of Carnegie Hall to perform piano trios by Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich. (212-247-7800. Oct. 14 at 8.)

SILK ROAD ENSEMBLE
The Rubin Museum, which promotes and preserves the arts of the Himalayas with both scholarly dispatch and urban flair, hosts a weeklong residency with the classical/world-music group, which will be crowned by a concert that features the world première of Wu Tong's "Nine Rivers," a showcase both for Wu's fine skills as a *sheng* player and for the Chinese and Tibetan music that has influenced him. (150 W. 17th St. 212-620-5000. Oct. 14 at 8. For full schedule, see www.rmanyc.org.)

AMERICAN MODERN ENSEMBLE: "MIDTOWN SOUND"
The young new-music group explores works in differing shades of neo-Romanticism by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composers Paul Moravec and Melinda Wagner, among others, along with small pieces by Babbitt and Cage—very uptown and downtown, respectively—for good measure. (Tenri Cultural Institute, 43A W. 13th St. Oct. 14 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

"STEVE REICH @ 70"
The Whitney Museum's celebration of the minimalist master's seventieth birthday reaches a climax with a four-hour marathon concert, in which such admired groups as Alarm Will Sound and So Percussion will perform a selection of classic works, including "Four Organs," "Clapping Music," and "Vermont Counterpoint" (with the flutist Ransom Wilson). (Madison Ave. at 75th St. Oct. 15 at 2. Seating, which is free with museum admission, will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis.)

PIETER WISPELWEY
The enterprising Dutch cellist—intimate with several centuries' worth of his instrument's repertory—takes on the sublime challenge of performing all of Beethoven's music for cello and piano in a single, three-hour concert. Dejan Lazic accompanies him. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Oct. 15 at 2.)

MET CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
Elliott Carter—with the help of the conductor James Levine—continues his astonishing Indian summer of creativity with "In the Distances of Sleep" (a Wallace Stevens cycle, with the mezzo-soprano Michelle DeYoung), part of a program including works by Mozart and Mendelssohn (the Octet). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Oct. 15 at 5.)

JUPITER SYMPHONY CHAMBER PLAYERS
Scandinavian music is in the spotlight in the group's latest concert, which features works by Christian Sinding, Jean Sibelius (a septet version of the tone poem "En Saga"), and Joseph Martin Kraus. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church. 212-799-1259. Oct. 16 at 2 and 7:30.)

AMERICAN BRASS QUINTET
A clutch of Giovanni Gabrieli's "Venetian Canzoni," the summit of Baroque brass music, anchors a program of otherwise American music (by Joan Tower and Adam Schoenberg, among others) offered in a concert by the country's preëminent brass ensemble. (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, Juilliard School. Oct. 16 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

MIRROR VISIONS ENSEMBLE: "WALT & EMILY"
The singers in this New Haven-based group, elegant and persistent advocates of new American music, perform two large song cycles based on texts by America's favorite poets: Tom Cipullo's "A Visit with Emily" (settings of poems by Emily Dickinson and of letters by her friend T. W. Higginson) and the world première of Russell Platt's "From Noon to Starry Night: A Walt Whitman Cantata" (with the soprano Jody Sheinbaum). Songs by Richard Lalli begin the evening. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. Oct. 16 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

DELIVER US FROM EVIL
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Oct. 13. (In wide release.)

ARSHILE GORKY, "ENIGMATIC COMBAT" (1936-1937)

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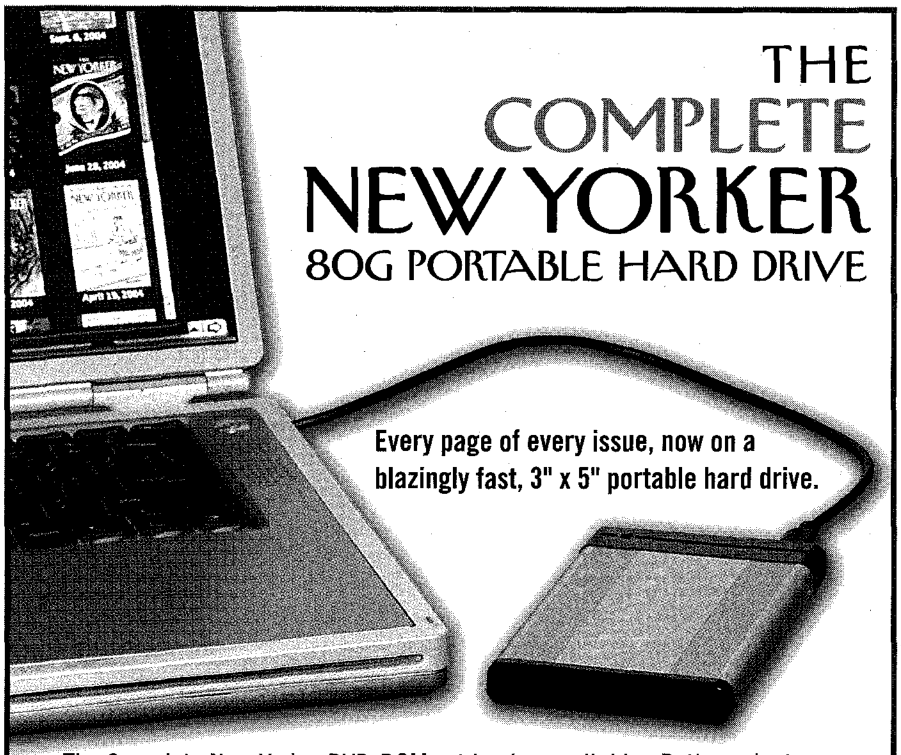

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DRIVING LESSONS
Rupert Grint stars in this comedy, directed by Jeremy Brock, about a teen-age boy who learns about life from an older actress (Julie Walters). Opening Oct. 13. (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

THE GRUDGE 2
Takashi Shimizu directed this horror sequel, starring Sarah Michelle Gellar and Amber Tamblyn. In English and Japanese. Opening Oct. 13. (In wide release.)

INFAMOUS
Douglas McGrath directed this bio-pic about Truman Capote and his research for "In Cold Blood." Starring Toby Jones, Sandra Bullock, and Daniel Craig. Opening Oct. 13. (In wide release.)

MAN OF THE YEAR
A comedy, directed by Barry Levinson, about the host of a political talk show (Robin Williams) who runs for President. Opening Oct. 13. (In wide release.)

THE MARINE
A thriller about a Marine whose girlfriend is kidnapped. Directed by John Bonito and starring John Cena, Kelly Carlson, and Jeff Chase. Opening Oct. 13. (In wide release.)

SO MUCH SO FAST
A documentary about Stephen Heywood, a twenty-nine-year-old man who was diagnosed with A.L.S. Directed by Steven Ascher and Jeanne Jordan. Opening Oct. 11. (Village East Cinemas.)

TIDELAND
A fantasy by Terry Gilliam about a motherless girl who communicates with her doll. Starring Jodelle Ferland, Jeff Bridges, and Jennifer Tilly. Opening Oct. 13. (IFC Center.)

NOW PLAYING

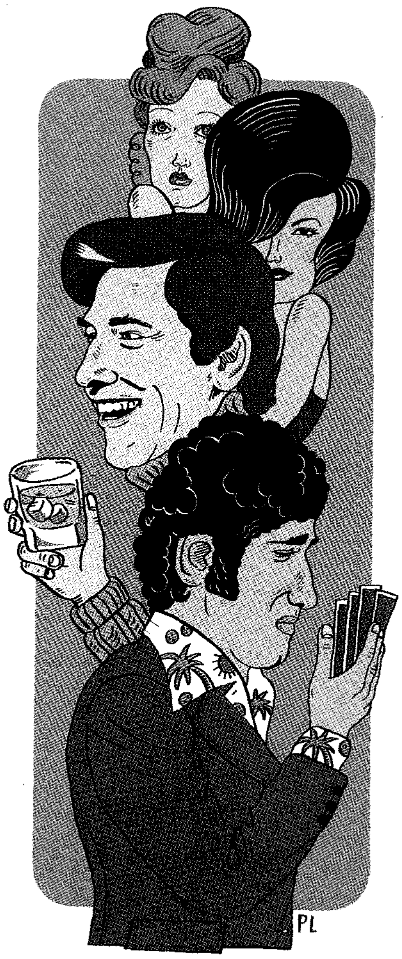
ALL THE KING'S MEN
Overemphatic and vague at the same time. Sean Penn, as Willie Stark, the Southern country boy who wants to be governor, wears his hair cropped close at the sides and standing up straight on top. Looking engorged, Penn works hard to put Willie's demagogic speeches over. (The burly Broderick Crawford, who played Willie in the earlier adaptation of Robert Penn Warren's novel, from 1949, was a more natural fit.) Willie rises abruptly, corrupting himself and everyone around him, but Steven Zaillian, who wrote and directed this version, doesn't give us much of a sense of what Willie actually does. What attracts Zaillian's interest is not politics but the social subtext of Penn Warren's novel—the way a crude country lawyer mesmerizes the feeble remnants of the old Southern aristocracy. Much of the movie is moony and slack. With the charming but recessive Jude Law as the reporter who throws in his lot with Willie; Kate Winslet and Mark Ruffalo, both awful, as ineffably cultivated siblings; James Gandolfini and Patricia Clarkson as backroom pols; and Anthony Hopkins as an old judge with a slab of white hair. James Horner wrote the overbearing music.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 10/2/06.) (In wide release.)

THE BLACK DAHLIA
This Brian De Palma movie about the notorious Betty Short murder case, from 1947, which was the basis for a 1987 novel by James Ellroy, suffers from rampant allusiveness to other movies set in Los Angeles. The picture is a kind of fattened goose that's been stuffed with . . . goose-liver pâté. It's overrich and fundamentally unsatisfying. De Palma's screenwriter, Josh Friedman, shovels tons of undigested Ellroy onto the screen. The hero, an honest young cop named Dwight Bleichert (Josh Hartnett), toiling at the edges of a tangled mess of betrayal stretching back for decades, never quite understands what's going on, and often we don't, either. The narrative is so awkwardly arranged that when the pieces of the puzzle finally fall into place the effect is less dramatic than diagrammatic—character A slept with character B thirty years earlier, and, oh, yes, all

film that's less aggressive than fans may expect. The muscular lyricism of the director, Ronny Yu, creates a kung-fu ballet, by turns contemplative and kinetically rich.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND

For the role of General Idi Amin Dada, the dictator of Uganda in the nineteen-seventies, Forest Whitaker has transformed himself. The laugh has become enormous, the arms like grappling hooks. This dictator has a terrifying affability: like many sociopaths, he can be intensely empathic. He figures out what people want, but, once you have received his generosity, he believes you belong to him forever. Whitaker goes all the way into Amin's childlike flights of fantasy and egotistical visions, and, as he speaks, one eye opens wide and the other droops malevolently—even his vision is schizoid. James McAvoy is the cocky young Scottish doctor who becomes the general's physician and confidant. Flattered by the great man's interest in him, he refuses to notice the purges and the slaughter going on in the country. Kevin Macdonald, who earlier made documentaries ("One Day in September" and "Touching the Void"), concentrates on the relationship of the two men, and makes something tense and alive out of it. With Gillian Anderson. Shot in Uganda.—*D.D.* (10/2/06) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

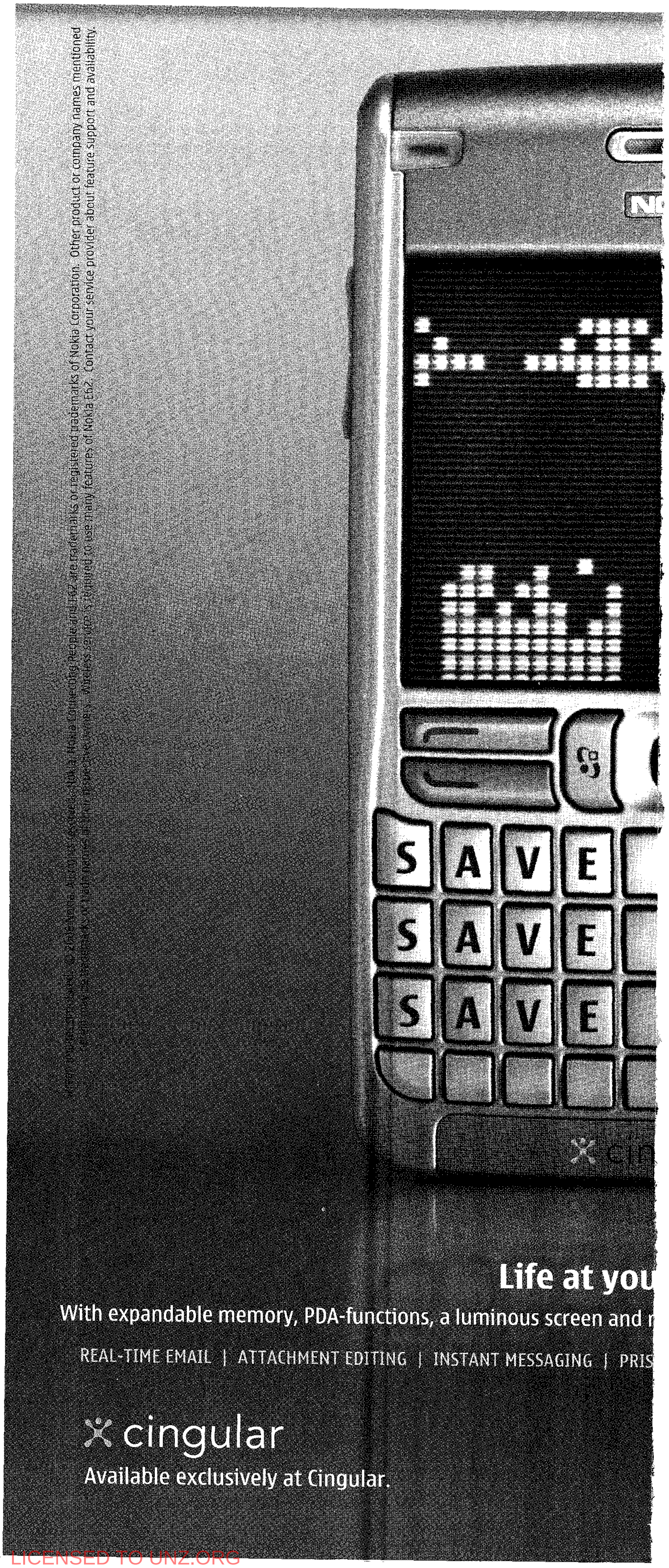


"California Split," at Film Forum.

THE LAST KISS

The tiresome premise of Tony Goldwyn's remake of an Italian hit film from 2001—a twenty-nine-year-old architect, Michael (Zach Braff), freaks out at the news that his girlfriend is pregnant and falls for a cute college girl (the intriguing Rachel Bilson)—plays out ploddingly in spite of some terrific acting. Jacinda Barrett steals the show as Michael's beautiful, reasonable life part-

PATRICK LONG



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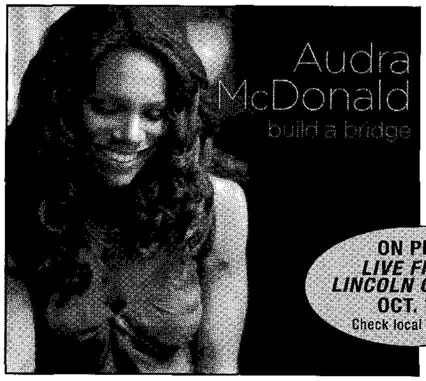

The four-time Tony-winning singer and actress releases her first solo album in four years, featuring music by contemporary singer/songwriters including Burt Bachrach/Elvis Costello, Adam Guettel, John Mayer, Nellie McKay, Rufus Wainwright, Neil Young, and others.

"I wanted to make an album that wasn't necessarily theater music but whose material spoke to me that way. The songs I landed on felt like they had a story or a character I could get into and really explore." *Audra McDonald*

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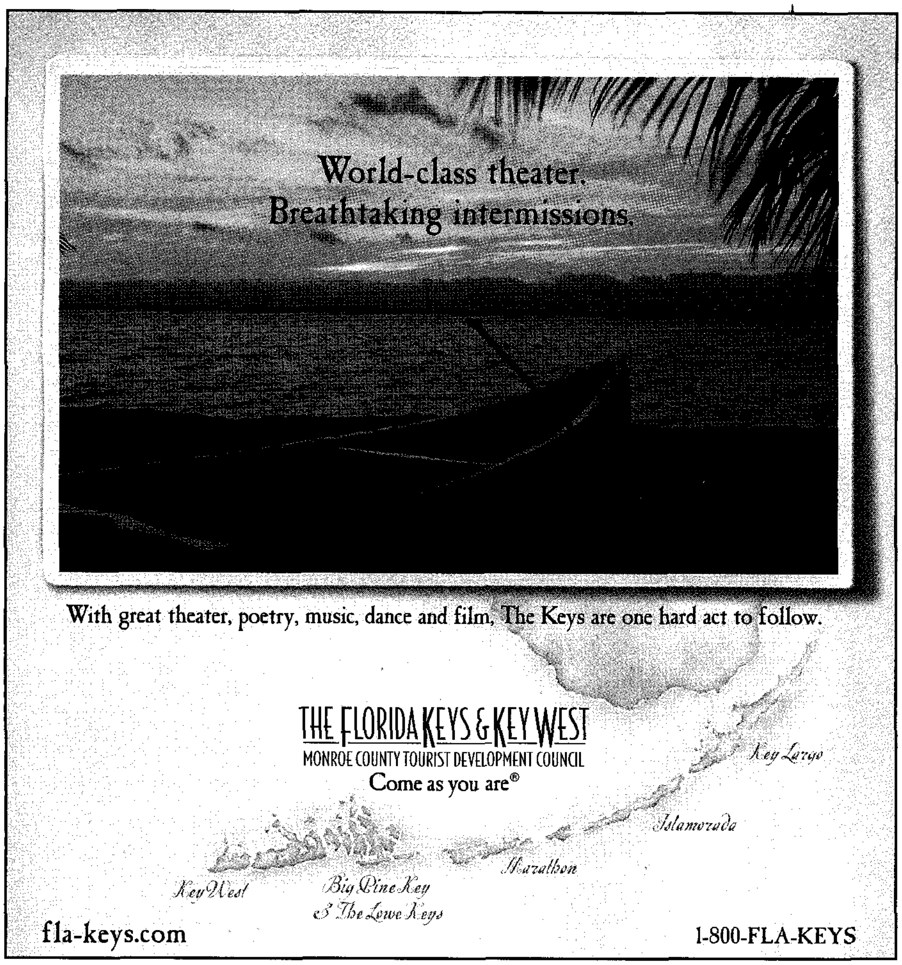

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ner, offering a volatile, realistic portrayal of a woman scorned, and a subplot with Blythe Danner and Tom Wilkinson as her unhappy parents threatens to be more interesting than any scene involving the unctuous Braff.—*S.L.* (In wide release.)

LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE
A charming, independently made family comedy about a winner-take-all society—America—that is driving its citizens crazy. Its hero and victim, Richard Hoover (Greg Kinnear), is a motivational speaker who has invented a nine-step program for success. His seven-year-old daughter, Olive (Abigail Breslin), is entering a Little Miss Sunshine contest; his stepson, Dwayne (Paul Dano), has a private dream in which he is a Nietzschean Übermensch; his wife's brother (Steve Carell), whom the family has taken in, is the No. 1 Proust scholar in the country but has made a fool of himself over a male graduate student who has leaped into the bed of the No. 2 Proust scholar. Is winning everything? The writer, Michael Arndt, and the husband-and-wife directing team, Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris, narrowly avoid the family-comedy pitfalls of whimsy and mush, but Arndt has a good ear for domestic irritations and the acting is just tough enough to keep us off balance.—*D.D.* (7/31/06) (In wide release.)

THE QUEEN
The new Stephen Frears film considers the deadlock, both grieving and comical, that followed the death of the Princess of Wales in 1997. On the one hand, the Queen (Helen Mirren), believing it to be a private matter, stays and broods in Scotland with the Duke of Edinburgh (James Cromwell) and Prince Charles (Alex Jennings). On the other hand, Tony Blair (Michael Sheen), sensing a thirst for public mourning and thus a unique political opportunity, urges Her Majesty to return to London and face down the mob. And so she does; the crux of the drama comes when Mirren turns to the crowd outside Buckingham Palace and, with one smile, quashes any prospect of rebellion. The script, by Peter Morgan, relies largely on well-grounded speculation, and sticklers for accuracy will find the whole thing straying beyond belief; but, thanks to the careful performances, you subscribe all too readily to the movie's suggestion of a divided land—of a Britain caught between the trustworthy stiffness of tradition and a liberalism that is open not just to emotional honesty but to the coarseness of modern excess. With Helen McCrory as a distinctly unceremonious Cherie Blair.—*A.L.* (10/9/06) (In wide release.)

RENAISSANCE
The plot is nothing new. A woman goes missing in a shadow-drenched city, and a taciturn cop, assigned to the case, unpeels her secret, and, with it, a lurking conspiracy. What lifts Christian Volckman's movie above other recent stabs at film noir is the precision with which it sets out to look, and feel, as noir as technically possible. The story is semi-animated, with the gestures of real actors transferred by motion capture to the stylized figures who stalk the black-and-white landscape. (Grays are kept to a minimum, lest they dilute the mood.) The setting is Paris, just under fifty years from now, and Volckman toys with the gothic elongations to which the city has succumbed; the result may not be credible, but it flirts cleverly with the limits of the imaginable. The chief villain turns out to be the shrivelled dialogue, which—even though spoken by performers such as Daniel Craig and Jonathan Pryce—would probably sound better in French.—*A.L.* (9/25/06) (Sunshine Cinema.)

SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS
In this flat, sour, and contrived comedy, Roger (Jon Heder), a timid New York City parking cop who is overmatched at work and in love, signs up for classes with a macho confidence guru, Dr. P. (Billy Bob Thornton), and, taught

of that connects to crimes X, Y, and Z. With Aaron Eckhart as Dwight's partner; Scarlett Johansson in a sweater, her hair up, as a lushly sensual baby Lana Turner; Hilary Swank, her mouth twisted with desire, as a lecherous, lying, raven-haired heiress; and Mia Kirshner as Betty Short herself—a slender, frightened girl glimpsed in some screen tests, a girl desperately eager to please.—*D.D.* (9/18/06) (In wide release.)

CALIFORNIA SPLIT
Robert Altman (working from a script by Joseph Walsh) plunges into the betting action in L.A. and Reno, relaying an electric scent of jumpy nerves. When his gamblers' stakes are on the table, their lives are on the line—what counts is handling the tension. George Segal, a writer, can barely hack it; seeking out luck's secrets, he's drawn to Elliott Gould, who looks like the real thing, a natural gambler whose soul calls out for winning hands and lucky numbers. As they hop from ponies to poker to prizefights, we come to see their crapshoot of an existence as a quest not just for thrills and highs but for some pagan form of validation. Altman lets us savor the kick of gambling even as he demonstrates its limits. Gould and Segal, past masters of prolonged adolescence, conjure the prickly chemistry of buddies who make each other nervous. And the supporting players flit through the gambling halls as if they were locked in a self-destructive trance—you feel that their shirts must be soaked through. Lou Lombardo did the superb, intuitive editing. Released in 1974.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Oct. 13-17.)

DELIVER US FROM EVIL
The director Amy Berg uses the story of the pedophiliac priest Oliver O'Grady to frame her unequivocal denunciation of the Catholic Church for its long history of concealing rampant child abuse by priests. Although the documentary lacks cohesion, its portraits of O'Grady's victims and their families are honest and heartbreaking. Berg's full access to O'Grady, who was protected by his bishop in California (Father Roger Mahony, a future cardinal) despite molesting hundreds of victims for decades, provides a window into the damaged soul of a seemingly gentle but mentally deranged man. A psychologist's lucid explanation of why so many priests demonstrate pedophiliac behavior offers a moment of clarity in this exigent cry for action.—*Shauna Lyon* (Angelika Film Center.)

GRIDIRON GANG
All those years in the wrestling ring have given The Rock (Dwayne Johnson) an amusing self-awareness. He's charismatic and stentorian and doesn't take a damn thing seriously. In this film, another crowd-pleasing take on "The Longest Yard," he plays a tough but tender coach who inspires a group of juvenile offenders to take their violent impulses to the playing field instead of to the streets. The director, Phil Joanou, gives the material a confident staging, even when the heavy-handed speeches about teamwork and responsibility threaten to reduce the movie to an after-school special.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

A GUIDE TO RECOGNIZING YOUR SAINTS
The kind of fervent mess that is praised as "raw" and "authentic." The writer-director Dito Montiel, drawing on his own memoir of growing up in Astoria, Queens, in the eighties, is played by Robert Downey, Jr., as a sad, silent, guilty man returning home to the tumultuous neighborhood of his youth. Most of the movie is about his early years. Dito and his friends get in trouble in ways that are so foolish—every scene is a pointless fight—that one thinks Montiel has no reason to feel bad about leaving. Shia LaBeouf, however, shows promise as the sensitive young Dito. With Chazz Palminteri as Dito's hapless father, Dianne Wiest as his mother, and Channing Tatum as his agitated and stupid friend Antonio.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

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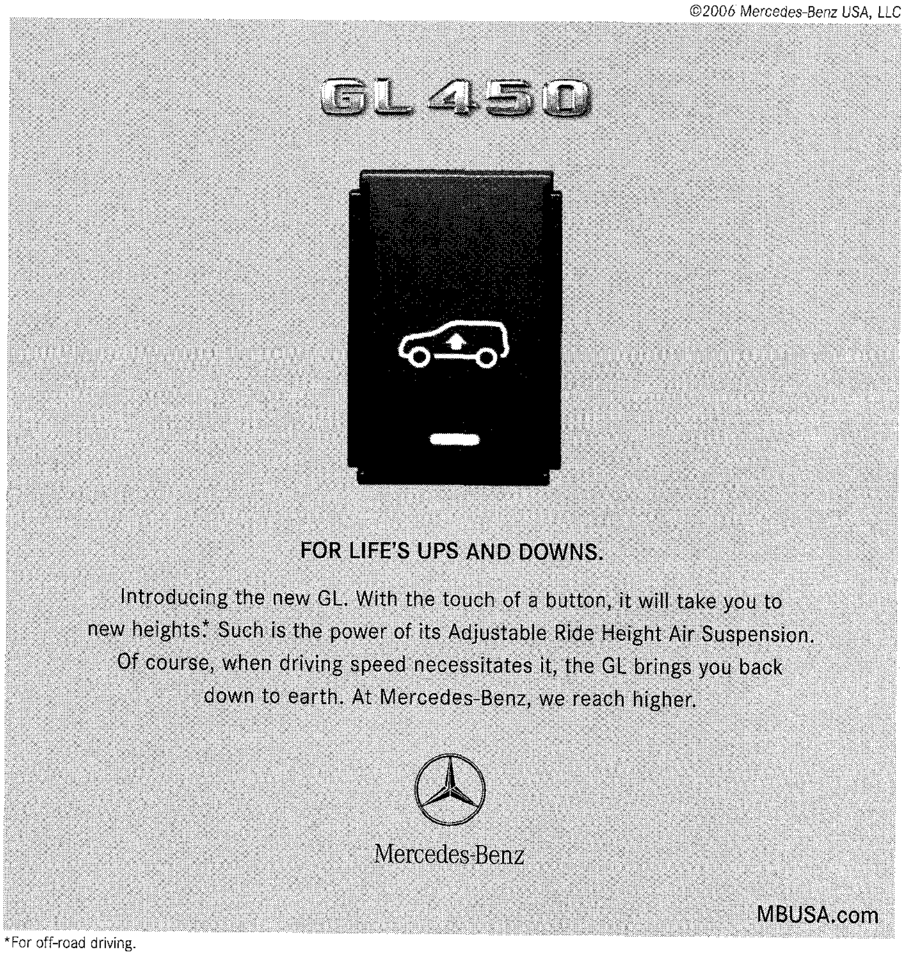

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HOLLYWOODLAND
Allen Coulter's mystery movie is itself hard to unpack: part period drama, part open-ended thriller, it pays uneasy homage to a bad dream of stardom. Ben Affleck plays George Reeves, the cheerful hulk of the nineteen-fifties who was unable to repeat on the big screen his popular triumph as Superman on the small one. Diane Lane turns in yet another fine performance, at once strong-minded and easily bruised, in the role of Reeves's older married lover. Reeves's death, in 1959, has long been one of the minor enigmas of Hollywood, and we duly follow a fictional detective (Adrien Brody) as he tries, and fails, to deliver a clear solution. The problem is not just that Brody seems too reedy and gentle for a private eye but that the aftermath of Reeves's career is no match for the brief and glamorous flare of the living man. In the end, the movie belongs to Lane, for her portrait of a beautiful woman mounting a wry, doomed defense against the abrasions of time. With Bob Hoskins as her husband, a doting, cuckolded thug.—*Anthony Lane* (9/11/06) (In wide release.)

INSIANG
Lino Brocka's intense, angry melodrama from the Philippines proves the documentary veracity of a well-constructed narrative. The title character (a fierce, dignified young Hilda Koronel) is the daughter of a vengeful, sexually voracious shrew who hates the girl because of her philandering father, who abandoned the family. The young woman loves the ineffectual Bebot and spurns the advances of her mother's live-in lover, Dado, a gigolo and petty bandit who is the neighborhood bully. Smarting from Insiang's rejection, Dado rapes her. Unable to escape the shantytown, she instead seeks revenge. Brocka's method is unflinching: filming on location in a slum neighborhood in Manila, where jobs are scarce and backbreaking labor is coveted, he fills the conventional drama with the desperate striving of its residents and the steady frame with the elements of their subsistence. Open sewers, outdoor plumbing, gambling tables, and smoking garbage dumps are as much the agents of destiny as the characters whose existence they define. Released in 1976. In Filipino, English, and Tagalog.—*Richard Brody* (New York Film Festival; Oct. 14.)

JESUS CAMP
Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady document a growing evangelical-Christian movement in the Midwest, focussing on a Pentecostal children's-camp pastor, Becky Fischer, and three young campers. The filmmakers insinuate that the religious right, a powerful voting bloc in the U.S., is training a generation of children ("God's army") to carry on their message. In brief scenes of the children's home lives, their parents teach creationism as fact and deny the existence of global warming. The compassionate portraits resonate with empathy, particularly those of Rachael, nine, a sweet, nervous ball of energy who revels in the thought of being considered a martyr, and Levi, twelve, a bright, idealistic young man eager to preach the Gospel. Ewing and Grady present the Methodist radio host Mike Papantonio, a staunch defender of the separation of church and state, as a voice of opposition to Pastor Becky's evangelical beliefs, but the recalcitrant nature of her doctrine remains impenetrable.—*S.L.* (In wide release.)

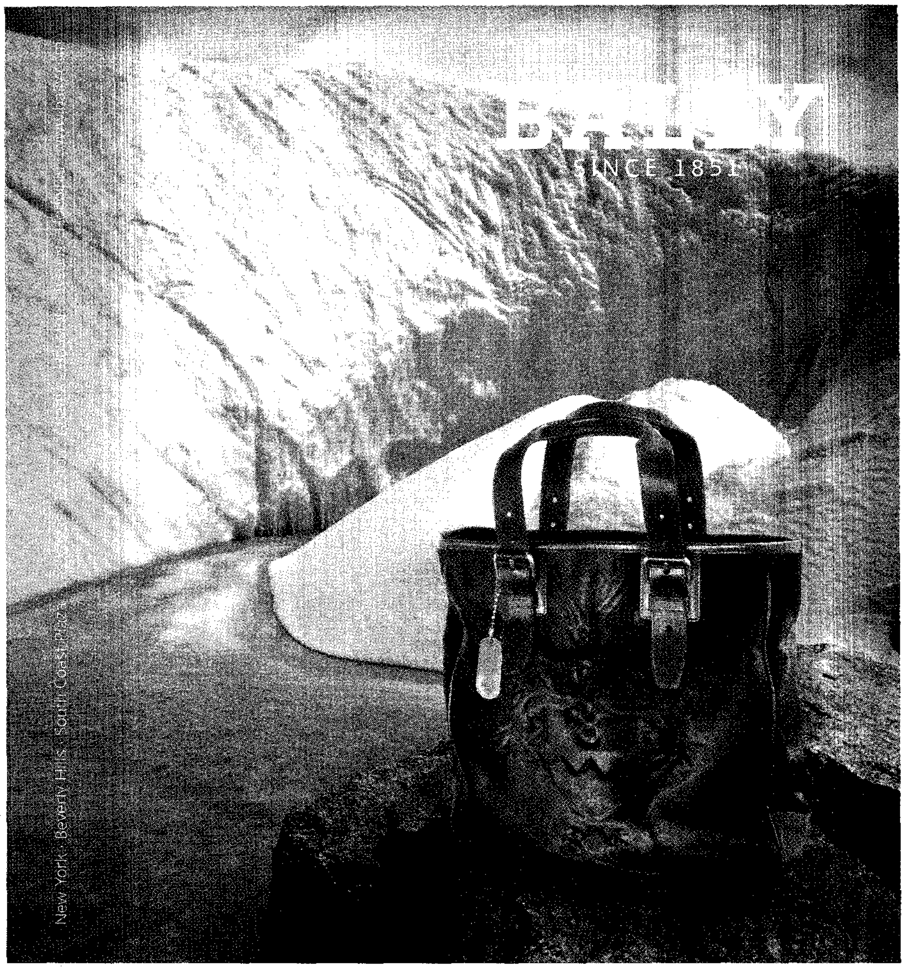
JET LI'S FEARLESS
Bracketed by supremely satisfying martial-arts scenes choreographed by the action wizard Yuen Wo Ping, Jet Li's new period epic, the biography of the martial-arts expert Huo Yuanjia, is a textbook example of the art of wushu, a physical discipline and spiritual philosophy that values honor and humility above all. The film concentrates on Huo's journey from drunken master to noble hero, and the lavish settings and Li's agile, dynamic performance combine to make a thoughtful action

to find his inner lion, gets up the nerve to ask out his secret dream girl, his Australian grad-student neighbor, Amanda (Jacinda Barrett). Dr. P.'s brutal psychodramatic methods, however, also include his own attempt to seduce Amanda, and the movie becomes an escalating war of scams with which the two contenders try to discredit, displace, and destroy each other. Despite the attempt at authenticity through the use of real and recognizable New York locations, the gleefully mean-spirited humor quickly ramps up to a ludicrous implausibility. The good premise, funny actors, and sharp, nasty dialogue are wasted on ridiculous situations that seem created for exaggerated gags that don't even have the virtue of cartoonishness. Unpleasant, unfunny, and unnecessary racial stereotypes abound; what were Scot Armstrong (who co-wrote) and Todd Phillips (who co-wrote and directed) thinking?—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

THE SCIENCE OF SLEEP
The new project from Michel Gondry proves that he is still determined to treat cinema as an advanced form of child's play. Gael García Bernal plays a young Mexican, recently returned to Paris, who takes a dreary job and meets a couple of French girls when they drill through the wall of his apartment. One of them (Charlotte Gainsbourg) almost becomes his paramour, and his stumbles toward her—not to mention the dreams that he wraps around her—make up the bulk of the story. Gondry scorns any need to mark the border of sleeping and waking, slipping like a spy between the two; normal conversations keep branching off into fantasy, and a grinning Bernal takes every change in stride. The outcome is sometimes jubilant but mostly shapeless, and Gondry could have used some help from Charlie Kaufman, with whom he concocted "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind." Despite the sprightly makeover, it's the old problem: when people start telling you their dreams, you don't know where to look. In Spanish, English, and French.—*A.L.* (9/25/06) (In wide release.)

THE SHOOTING
Monte Hellman's low-budget Western, made in 1965, offers primal violence with a modernist chill. After a hardscrabble rancher is gunned down in cold blood, a nameless young woman gunslinger (Millie Perkins, whose cold, refined hysteria blends Tippi Hedren and Katharine Hepburn) arrives at his outpost and hires the clever Willett Gashade (Warren Oates) and the dull Coley Boyard (Will Hutchins) to guide her through an empty, quasi-lunar desert wilderness to a distant town for no reason that she's willing to give. Throughout the existential journey, she plays them against each other and signals her hired gun, Billy Spear (a sardonic, tooth-flashing young Jack Nicholson, who co-produced), to join them when their talents no longer suit her whim. Carole Eastman's literate, harshly naturalistic script gives the characters a half-Biblical, half-backcountry poetic patois and demythologizes their mission, reducing the West to drudgery, sunburn, and constant danger. Hellman's tight telephoto shots press the characters entomologically against the barren landscape; he revels in the technical charms of the medium and the scruffiness of his B-movie budget as audaciously as a French New Wave director, concluding with a blank, cerebral ending that is as ingenious as it is mysterious.—*R.B.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Oct. 12.)

SHORTBUS
John Cameron Mitchell's sex-drenched study of a group of beautiful, emotionally lost New Yorkers on a quest for intimacy. The movie's central characters—a couples therapist who can't achieve orgasm (Sook-Yin Lee), a depressed ex-hustler and his boyfriend (played by the real-life couple Paul Dawson and PJ DeBoy), and an unhappy dominatrix (Lindsay Beamish)—are one-dimensional stereotypes of sad and lonely outsiders, but Mitchell's eager camerawork and playful screenplay filled with snappy comic asides elevate the film's less than compelling emotional aspects. When everyone comes together at the underground sex club, "Shortbus," the film ex-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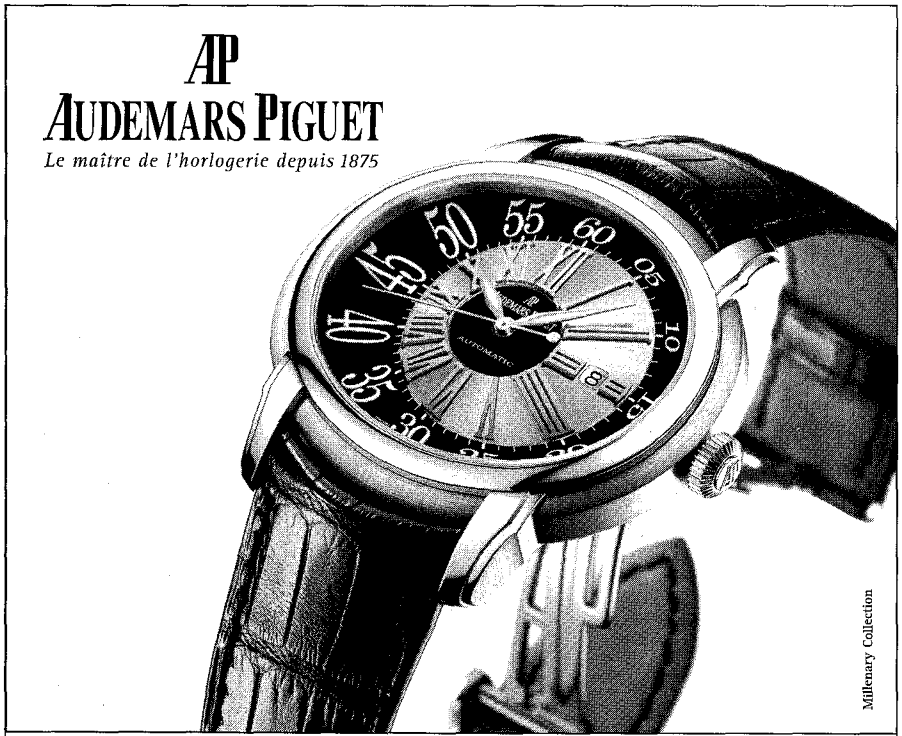
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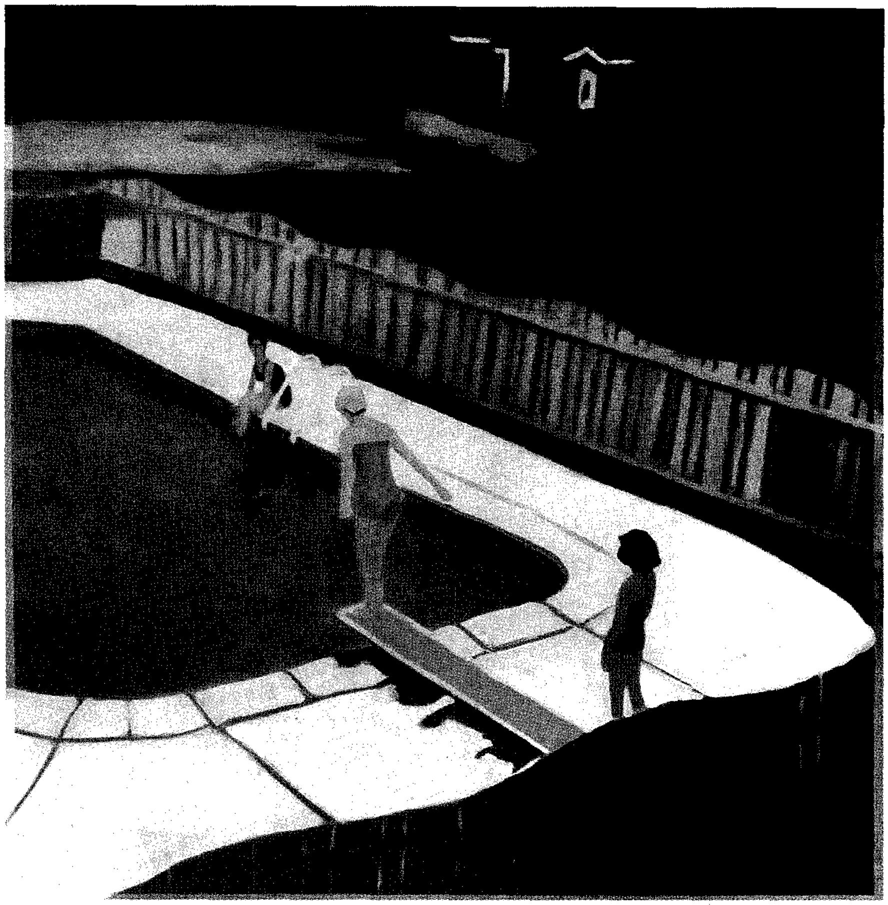


Isca Greenfield-Sanders's "Yellow Suit Diver" (2006), at Goff & Rosenthal.

poses itself for what it really is—a sentimental, neo-romantic film where hedonism is a tonic for the masses.—*B.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

VIRIDIANA
In Luis Buñuel's perverse comedy, from 1961, the title character, a young blond nun (Silvia Pinal, a prototype for Catherine Deneuve), comes to ruin through the double bind of others' evil plans and her own good works. Taken from a convent one last time to visit a wealthy uncle, a pious lecher (Fernando Rey), she is snared in his lascivious scheme to install her in the place of her late aunt—who died in his arms on their wedding day. As penitence, she converts his estate to a shelter for beggars, exposing herself to a feral carnality no less destructive than his insidious kind. As ever with Buñuel, religion and lust are one (Bach and rock inflame desire equally, and a habit is as arousing as a bustier), and the devil is in the details: the bare feet of a girl jumping rope, a burning crown of thorns, and a pocketknife concealed in a cross all execute his whiplash vision as stingingly as the anarchistic doings. In Spanish.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Oct. 12-13.)

Also Playing

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH: In wide release. **FLYBOYS:** In wide release. **49 UP:** IFC Center. **THE GUARDIAN:** In wide release. **JACKASS NUMBER TWO:** In wide release. **OPEN SEASON:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. Oct. 12-13 and Oct. 16 at 6:30 and 9:15, Oct. 14-15 at 3:15, 6:30, and 9:15, and Oct. 17 at 9:15: "Out of Place: Memories of Edward Said" (2005, Makoto Sato). ♦ Oct. 14-15 at 6 and 8:30: "Edward Said: The Last Interview" (2004, Mike Dibb).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"J'Aime le Cinéma Américain: Agnès B. Selects." Oct. 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Julien Donkey-Boy" (1999, Harmony Korine). ♦ The films of Monte Hellman. Oct. 12 at 7:30 and 9:30: "The Shooting" (†). ♦ Oct. 13 at 2, 4:30, and 7:30: "Ride in the Whirlwind" (1965). The 7:30 screening is followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ Oct. 14 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Two-Lane Blacktop" (1971). ♦ Oct. 15 at 2 and 6:50: "Flight to Fury" (1964). ♦ Oct. 15 at 4:30 and 9:15: "Back Door to Hell" (1964). ♦ Oct. 16 at 4:30 and 7: "Outcast of the Islands" (1951, Carol Reed). The 7 P.M. screening is followed by a discussion with Hellman and the critic Elliott Stein.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Oct. 11-12 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie" (1972, Luis Buñuel; in French). ♦ Oct. 13-17 at 1, 3:10, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "California Split" (†).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Oct. 31: French comedies. Oct. 17 at 12:30 and 6:30: "French Twist" (1995, Josiane Balasko; in French). ♦ Oct. 17 at 3:30 and 9: "Bernie" (1996, Albert Dupontel; in French).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Eric Rohmer's "Six Moral Tales." Oct. 13-15 at noon: "La Collectionneuse" (1967; in French). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Oct. 13-14: "The Beales of Grey Gardens" (1975/2006, the Maysles brothers). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction." Oct. 17 at 7:30: The filmmaker Richard Leacock will present selections from his films.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Made in NY." Oct. 11 at 6: "Dog Day Afternoon" (1975, Sidney Lumet). ♦ Oct. 12 at 8:30: "Mean Streets" (1973, Martin Scorsese). ♦ Oct. 13 at 8:15: "Desperately Seeking Susan" (1985, Susan Seidelman). ♦ Oct. 14 at 2: "Manhattan" (1979, Woody Allen). ♦ Oct. 14 at 4:30 and Oct. 16 at 6: "My Dinner with André" (1981, Louis Malle). ♦ Oct. 14 at 7: "American Psycho" (2000, Mary Harron). ♦ Oct. 15 at 2 and Oct. 16 at 8:15: "Shaft" (1971, Gordon Parks). ♦ Oct. 15 at 4:30: "The French Connection" (1971, William Friedkin). ♦ Through Oct. 29: The films of Otto Preminger. Oct. 11 at 6:30: "Exodus" (1960). ♦ Oct. 14 at 7:30: "Advise and Consent" (1962). ♦ Oct. 16 at 7:45: "Skidoo" (1968). ♦ "Spotlight on Singapore." Oct. 12 at 6 and Oct. 13 at 8: "Singapore Gaga" (2005, Pin Pin Tan; in Arabic and Mandarin) and short films. ♦ "Prix Jean Vigo." All films are in French. Oct. 12 at 6:30: "A Beautiful Life" (1963, Robert Enrico). ♦ Oct. 13 at 6: "Pale Eyes" (2005, Jérôme Bonnell) and "Les Femmes de Stermetz" (1958, Louis Grospierre). ♦ Short films from the French film school La Fémis. Oct. 12 at 8, Oct. 14 at 5, and Oct. 15 at 1:30: Films by Noémie Lvovsky, Christine Carrière, Jean-Paul Civeyrac, François Ozon, Marina de Van, and Deniz Gamze Ergüven.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—In revival. Oct. 13 at 7:30, Oct. 14 at 3 and 6, and Oct. 15 at 5:30: "Kiss Me Deadly" (1955, Robert Aldrich). ♦ "Fist and Sword." Oct. 15 at 2: "Azumi" (2003, Ryuhei Kitamura; in Japanese).

NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600; for tickets, go to www.filmlinc.com)—Festival screenings. Oct. 11 at 6: "Our Daily Bread" (2006, Nikolaus Geyrhalter). ♦ Oct. 11 at 9: "Triad Election" (2006, Johnnie To; in Mandarin and Cantonese). ♦ Oct. 12 at 6: "These Girls" (2006, Tahani Rached; in Arabic). ♦ Oct. 12 at 9 and Oct. 14 at 6: "Climates" (2006, Nuri Bilge Ceylan; in Turkish). ♦ Oct. 13 at 6 and Oct. 14 at 9: "Poison Friends" (2006, Emmanuel Bourdieu; in French). ♦ Oct. 13 at 9 and Oct. 14 at 3: "Marie Antoinette" (2006, Sofia Coppola). ♦ Oct. 14 at noon: "Insiang" (†). ♦ Oct. 15 at 4 and 8: "Brand Upon the Brain" (2006, Guy Maddin). ♦ Oct. 15 at 8:30: "Pan's Labyrinth" (2006, Guillermo del Toro; in Spanish).

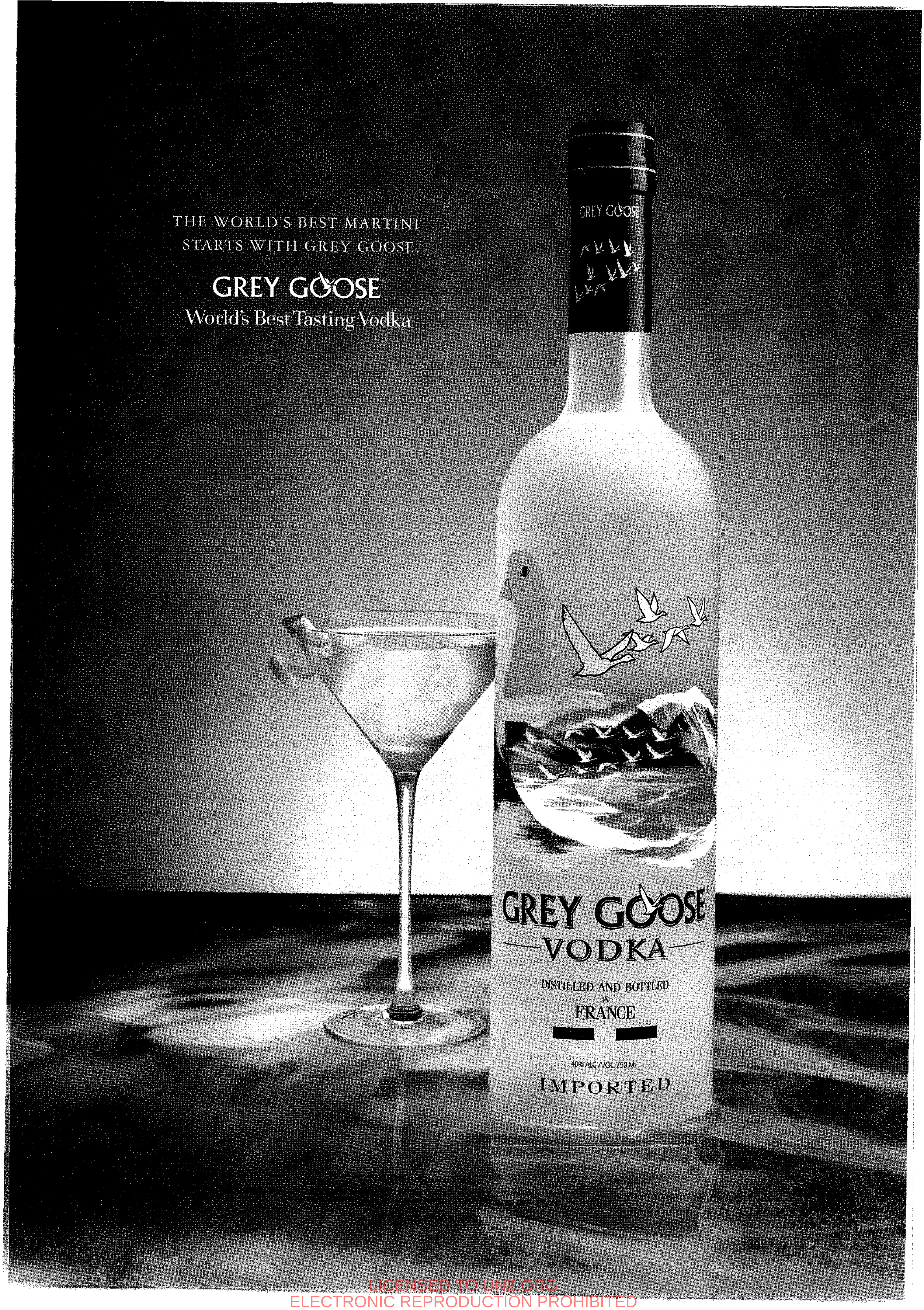
PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—Horror films. Oct. 11-19 at 9: "Frankenstein's Bloody Nightmare" (2006, John R. Hand). ♦ Oct. 13 at 11: "The Phantom of the Opera" (1925, Rupert Julian; silent). ♦ Oct. 14 at 12:40 A.M.: "Opera" (1987, Dario Argento). ♦ Oct. 16 at 7: "The Haunted Palace" (1963, Roger Corman). ♦ "Third I and Alwan Present." Oct. 17 at 6:30: "The Half-Meter Incident" (1981, Samir Zikra; in Arabic).

SCANDINAVIA HOUSE
58 Park Ave., between 37th and 38th Sts. (212-879-9779)—Through Dec. 16: Documentaries from Scandinavia. Oct. 11 at 6:30: "Raw Youth" (2004, Margreth Olin; in Norwegian).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Oct. 13-14: "The Shining" (1980, Stanley Kubrick).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Thalia Film Classics." Oct. 15 and Oct. 17 at 5: "Weekend" (1967, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). ♦ "Thalia Film Currents." Oct. 15 and Oct. 17 at 7: "Who Killed the Electric Car?" (2006, Chris Paine).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"50 Years of Janus Films," a New York Film Festival sidebar. Oct. 11 at 4:15, Oct. 12 at 9:15, and Oct. 17 at 1: "The Lady Vanishes" (1938, Alfred Hitchcock). ♦ Oct. 11 at 6:15: "Wild Strawberries" (1957, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ Oct. 12 at 2 and Oct. 13 at 6:15: "Viridiana" (†). ♦ Oct. 12 at 4: "The Makioka Sisters" (1983, Kon Ichikawa; in Japanese). ♦ Oct. 12 at 6:45: "The Organizer" (1963, Mario Monicelli; in Italian). ♦ Oct. 14 at 2 and Oct. 17 at 3:15: "Cleo from 5 to 7" (1961, Agnès Varda; in French) and "Zero for Conduct" (1933, Jean Vigo; in French).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READINGS AND TALKS

POETS HOUSE
Coach House Books, one of Canada's top literary presses, celebrates its fortieth anniversary with readings by four poets: Margaret Christakos, a.rawlings, Jon Paul Fiorentino, and Sina Queyras. (72 Spring St., 2nd fl. No tickets necessary. Oct. 11 at 7.)

CAVE CANEM FOUNDATION ANNIVERSARY
In 1996, the poets Toi Derricotte and Cornelius Eady started this organization to support and promote African-American poetry. They join Elizabeth Alexander, Lucille Clifton, Sonia Sanchez, and other writers at the City University of New York's Graduate Center for a series of readings and discussions to celebrate Cave Canem's tenth anniversary. (Fifth Ave. at 34th St. Oct. 12-13, with one additional reading on Oct. 14 at the LGBT Community Center, 208 W. 13th St. For more information, visit www.cavecanempoets.org.)

LEMONY SNICKET
Daniel Handler, a.k.a. Lemony Snicket, the author of the popular Series of Unfortunate Events books, joins his friend Stephin Merritt, of the band Magnetic Fields, for a performance and reading marking two significant events: the publication of "The End," the final installment in the series, and the release of "The Tragic Treasury," a collection of thirteen songs (one for each book) recorded by Merritt under the band name the Gothic Archies. (Barnes & Noble, 33 E. 17th St. No tickets necessary. Oct. 13 at 4.)

JAMES ELLROY
The L.A.-based crime writer drops by the Mysterious Bookshop, which recently moved from midtown to Tribeca, to talk about the film version of his book "The Black Dahlia." (58 Warren St., between Church St. and West Broadway. No tickets necessary. Oct. 13 at 6.)

LINTON KWESI JOHNSON
The British reggae musician and accomplished dub poet makes a pair of rare New York City appearances. On Oct. 15 at 7, L.K.J., as he is known, reads from his collection "Mi Revalueshanary Fren," which was recently published for the first time in the United States, at the Bowery Poetry Club. (308 Bowery. 212-614-0505.) Oct. 17 at noon: Johnson heads to Brooklyn for a reading at Long Island University. (1 University Plaza. 718-488-1000.)

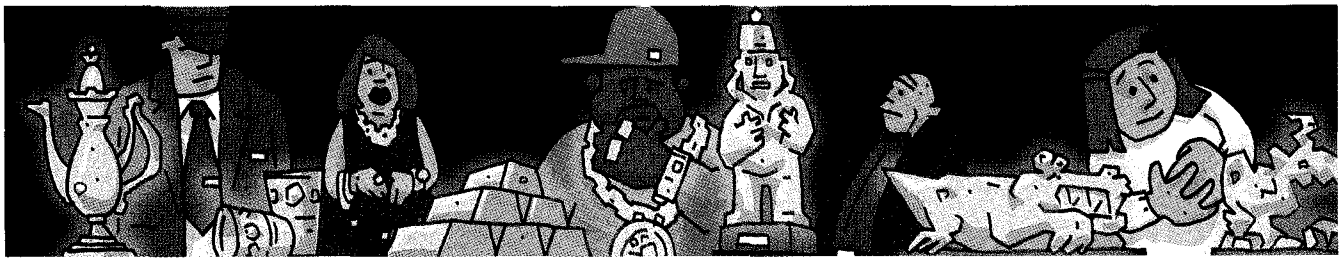
"WRITERS AT THE ALLIANCE"
The Educational Alliance, a settlement house dating back to 1889, presents a night of stories about New York City, with Caleb Crain, Melissa Plaut, and Brandon Stosuy. (197 East Broadway. No tickets necessary. Oct. 17 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

CFA-IAMS CAT CHAMPIONSHIP
The Cat Fanciers' Association, which celebrates its hundredth anniversary this year, brings its premier show to Madison Square Garden. (Oct. 14-15. For more information, visit www.cfa.org.)

DE LAMAR MANSION CENTENNIAL
In 1973, the Polish government bought an ornate mansion on Madison Avenue that had for fifty years housed the National Democratic Party. The elaborate structure, with its towering windows and mansard roof, designed by the noted architect C. P. H. Gilbert, was built in 1905 for the mining tycoon Joseph R. De Lamar. The Polish government, in honor of the centennial of De Lamar's occupancy, has organized an intriguing series of cultural events, including a keyboard performance by the film director David Lynch and the composer Marek Zebrowski, on Oct. 15 at 7; a talk by the writer Lawrence Weschler, on Oct. 18 at 7; and a night of cutting-edge multimedia art by more than thirty Polish artists, on Oct. 19 starting at 6. (For more information, visit www.polishconsulateny.org. Oct. 14-22.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
As if **Christie's** auction of Ellen Barkin's hoard of jewels from her ex-husband (on Oct. 10) weren't enough, the house plunges wholeheartedly into gem mania with a full day of jewelry sales (Oct. 11), featuring giant diamonds and strand upon strand of pearls. In the afternoon, there will be two specialized auctions, one devoted to the jeweler Van Cleef & Arpels (on its centennial), another to the diaphanous, organic shapes of Art Nouveau. Things mellow out on Oct. 13 with an offering of musical instruments, predominantly in the string family, and on Oct. 17, with a sober auction of Old Master paintings. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Jim Dine's "Some Greeks, Some Romans," a mixed-media work comprising a hundred and fifty portraits of emperors and empresses (once the property of Gianni Versace), is one of the highlights of **Sotheby's** contemporary-art sale on Oct. 11. Its offering of photographs on Oct. 17 includes a daguerreotype of a sickly-looking Edgar Allan Poe (he died less than a month after the sitting) and a stark, unapologetic nude by Edward Weston from 1922. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Always to be counted on for a bit of advice, the Futurists call on Italians to "Marciare, non marcire" (march, don't rot) on a propaganda sheet included in **Swann's** auction of art, press, and illustrated books (Oct. 12), featuring works from various European avant-garde movements, from Jugendstil to Surrealism and Dada. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



"Gold," coming to the American Museum of Natural History.

JEROEN KOOLHAAS

ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
HIGH VELOCITY
Oct. 24-29

The versatile choreographer Doug Varone brings his company to the Joyce for its twentieth-anniversary season. Performances will include the world première of "Lux," set to music by Philip Glass, and, from 2004, the powerful work "Castles." (212-242-0800.)

MOVIES
DAS KINO
Oct. 27-Nov. 3

MOMA's twenty-seventh annual survey of new German films features a pair of documentaries. "The Unknown Soldier," by Michael Verhoeven, explores the revelations that Wehrmacht soldiers killed civilians during the Second World War. "Hamburger Lektionen," by Romuald Karmakar, reproduces sermons by a Hamburg imam that were likely heard by several perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks. (212-708-9480.)

NIGHT LIFE
GUNSLINGERS
Nov. 10

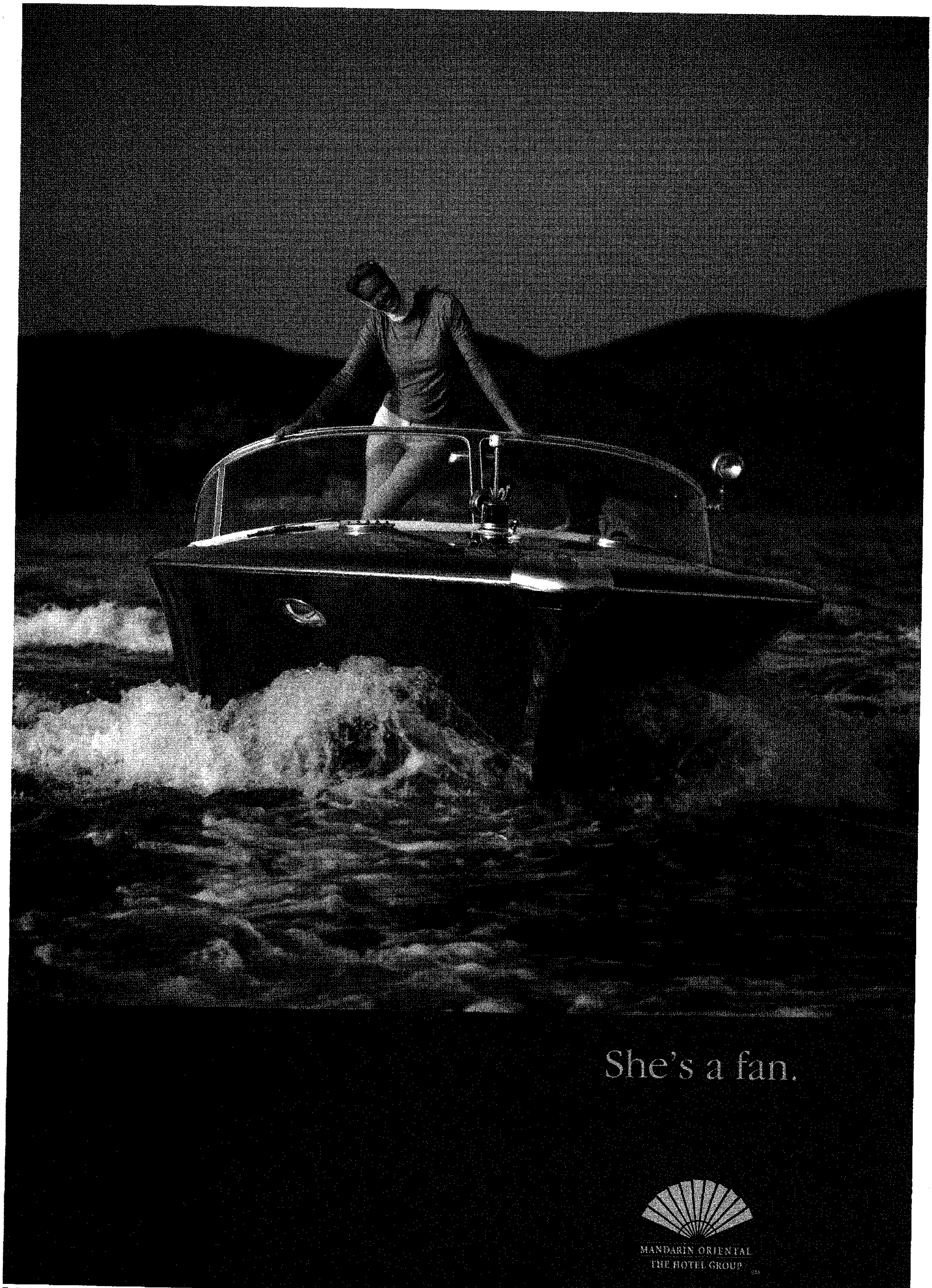
The local group Pistolera favors the fashions of the Mexican Revolution and has a foot-stomping sound that's one part *ranchera* and one part indie pop. Led by the guitarist and singer Sandra Lilia Velásquez, it celebrates the release of its début album, "Siempre Hay Salida," with a show at Joe's Pub. (212-539-8777.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CHEZ WYNTON
Nov. 16-18

The American Composers Orchestra performs with the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra in a concert of works blending classical and jazz influences, including the original version of "Rhapsody in Blue" (with the pianist Marcus Roberts) and a new work from the composer-clarinettist Derek Bermel. (212-721-6500.)

ART
SOLID
Nov. 18-Aug. 19, 2007

With the exhibition "Gold," the American Museum of Natural History gives the king of metals the royal treatment. Items like the La Trobe nugget of crystallized gold will provide geological context, while jewelry, coins, bars, and an Oscar statuette will trace the cultural history. (212-769-5100.)



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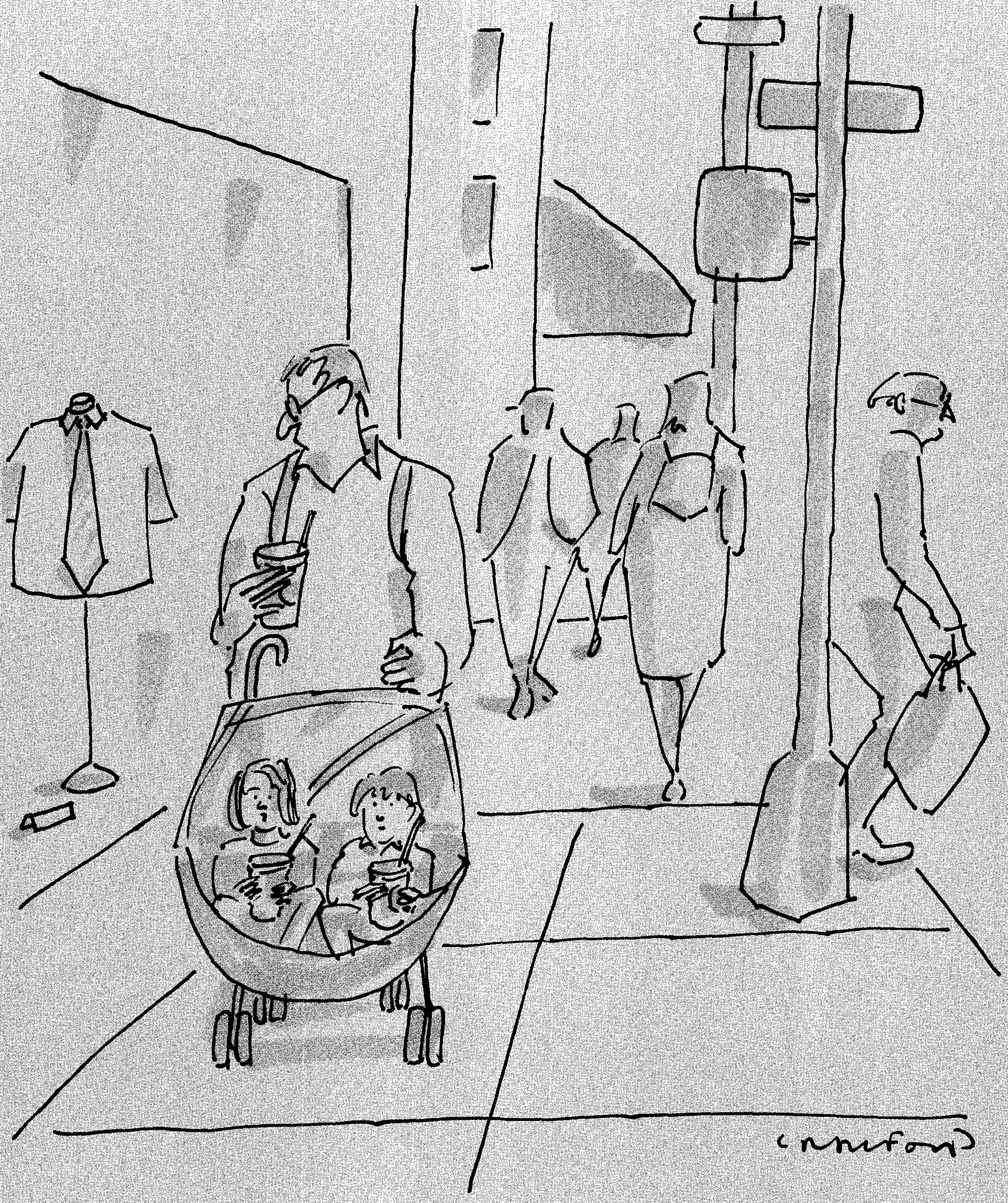

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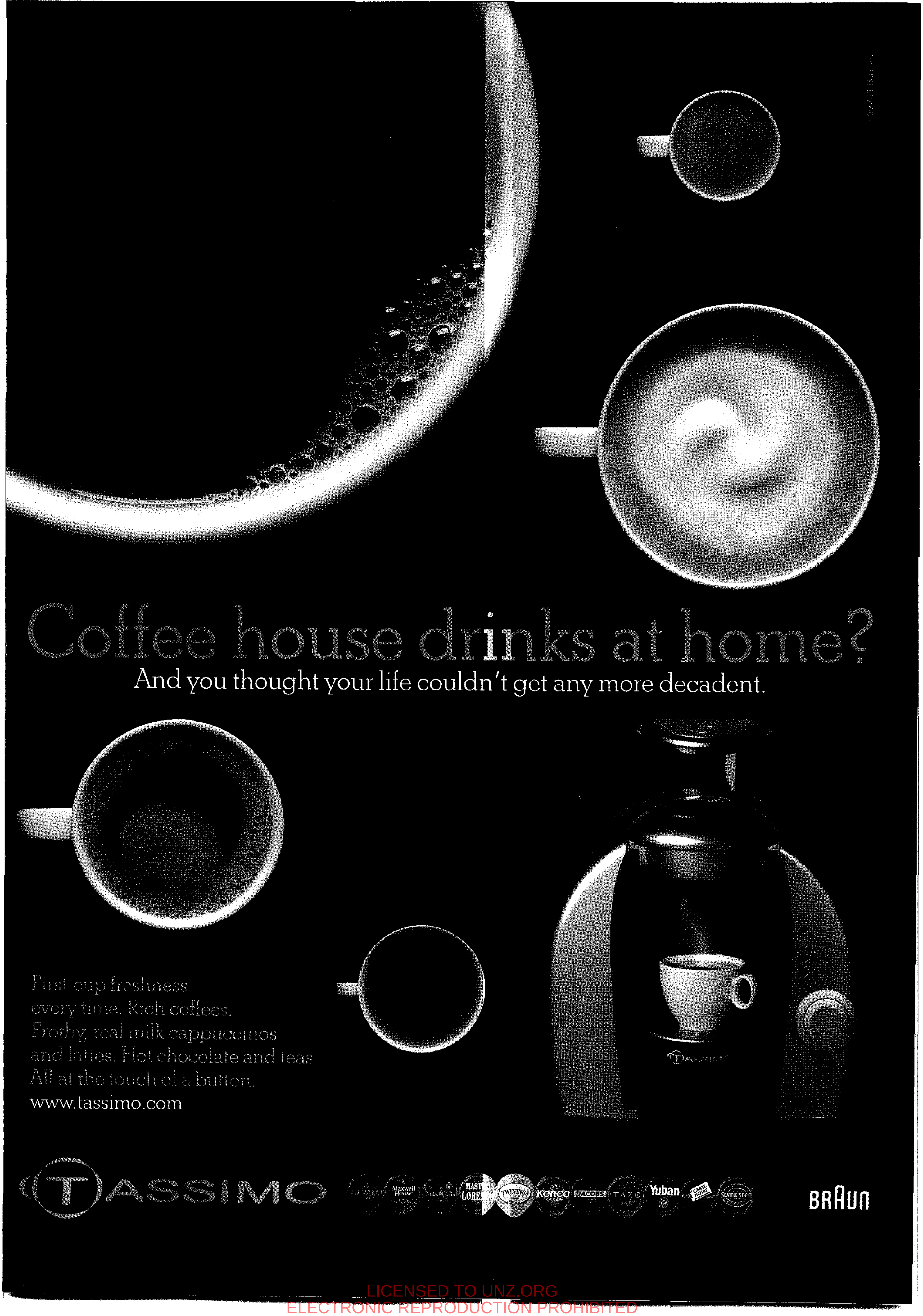

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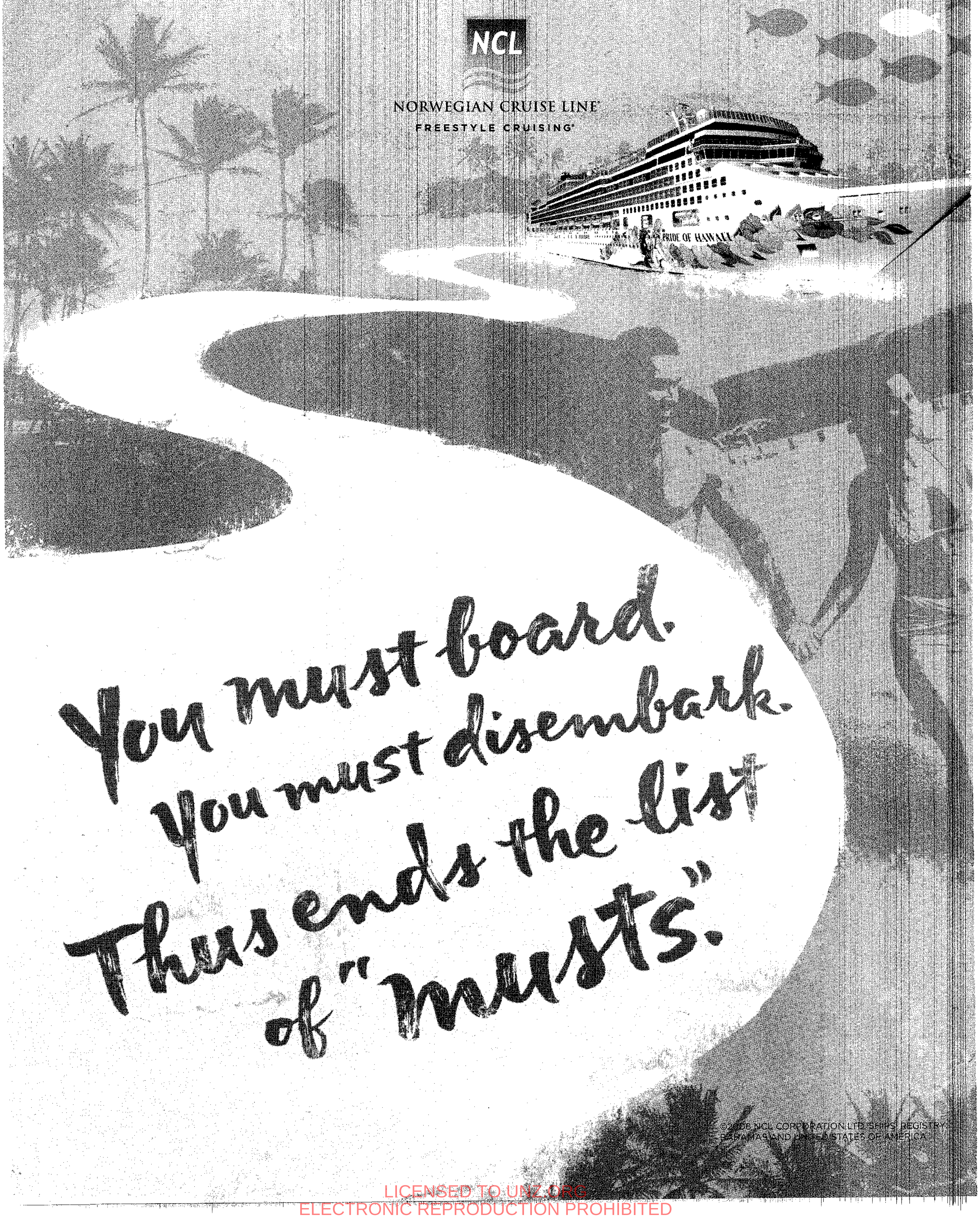
PRIDE OF HAWAII
You must board.
You must disembark.
Thus ends the list of "musts."

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THE
NEW YORKER

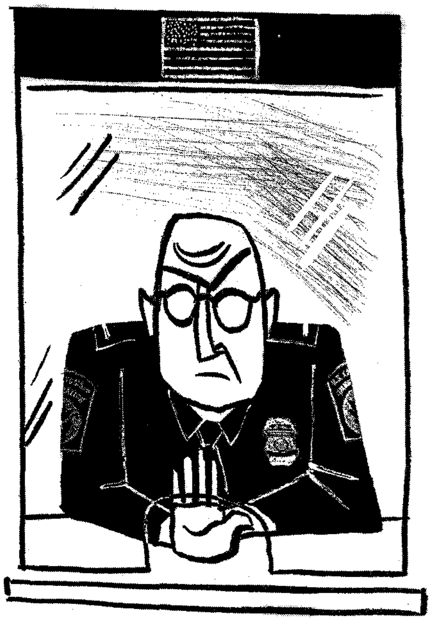
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
KEEP OUT

There is an American tradition of responding to threats by confusing thoughts with acts and temporarily forgetting what Jefferson set down, in 1779, as one of the country's founding principles: "that truth is great and will prevail if left to herself, that she is the proper and sufficient antagonist to error, and has nothing to fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition disarmed of her natural weapons, free argument and debate." The modern legislative history of banning undesirable opinions from American shores began in 1918, when Congress passed the Anarchist Act, which was designed to keep out people with subversive ideas. In 1952, as the McCarthy era was reaching its hysterical phase, the Immigration and Nationality Act, better known as McCarran-Walter, added Communists to the list of aliens to be excluded from entry. In the following years, Graham Greene, Gabriel García Márquez, Pablo Neruda, and Dario Fo were denied visas.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

In the age of terror, the Patriot Act denies entry to anyone who materially supports a terrorist organization, which is defined in hopelessly broad terms as any group of two or more people who intend to kill or inflict harm upon others. Among many thousands of foreigners, the law has kept out the Swiss-Egyptian scholar Tariq Ramadan. Ramadan is a grandson of the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood and is an Islamist himself. He argues for a large role for religion in Arab-Muslim states and an assertion of Muslim identity alongside citizenship in Western democracies. (Some critics accuse him of concealing more radical views; their evidence is thin.) His lectures and his books on Islam and the West have gained him a following among young European Muslims. In 2004, Ramadan was given a tenured appointment at the University of Notre Dame. He had rented a house in South Bend, shipped his furniture there, and enrolled his children in Indiana schools, when the State Department, acting on secret information from the Department of Homeland Security, revoked the visa that it had granted him. It has taken two years of repeated applications and inquiries, as well as a lawsuit by American civil-liberties, academic, and literary organizations, for Ramadan to receive an official explanation: between 1998 and 2002, he donated about seven hundred and seventy dollars to a pro-Palestinian French charity that was suspected of channelling money to Hamas, and which did not appear on the State Department's blacklist until 2003. Ex post facto, Ramadan has run afoul of the Patriot Act.



It's hard to shake the suspicion that what has really kept Ramadan out is his ideas. State and Homeland Security have interpreted the language of the Patriot Act so loosely that, according to official documents released under the Freedom of Information Act, anyone who is guilty of "irresponsible expressions of opinion" can be refused entry to the United States. In this climate, the American Civil Liberties Union reports, the government has recently denied, delayed, or revoked visas to a group of seventy-five South Korean farmers and trade unionists opposed to a free-trade agreement; a Marxist Greek academic; a Sri Lankan hip-hop singer, whose lyrics were deemed sympathetic to the Tamil Tigers and the Palestine Liberation Organization; a Bolivian professor of Latin-American history who had been offered a position at the University of Nebraska; a Basque historian; a former Sandinista minister of health; and nine thousand five hundred Burmese refugees.

In these official follies there is an apparent mixture of deliberate ideological exclusion and blind bureaucratic stupidity. Among refugees, the government has kept out anti-Castro Cubans, Vietnamese and Laotian Montagnards, Liberians, Somalis, and Colombian peasants, all of them barred for voluntary or coerced support of armed groups, all of them desperate for asylum in this country. In the aftermath of September 11th, the United States drastically reduced the number of people admitted as political refugees. In 1992, there were more than 130,000; this year, of 60,000 slots, only 41,500 have been filled. Most of these cases of exclusion are so unjust that an unusual coalition of congressional liberals and conservatives is advocating a change to the Patriot Act.

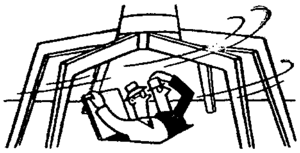
Getting a visa has, inevitably, become harder since 2001. Consular offices have to vet every applicant with a battery of intrusive questions, and if an applicant's name is Ahmed Abdullah there is a chance that it will light up the name-check system and force his application into a congressionally mandated clearance process that can last months, involving not just the State Department but also the Department of Homeland Security. Because the government's explanations are so minimal, the ensuing delay seems insulting as well as inconvenient, and by the time the visa is finally granted the applicant's ardor to rush into the embrace of freedom may well have cooled. Iranians, whom we should be welcoming as freely as possible, suffer particularly arduous waits.

The larger problem is that terrorism has created an atmosphere in which no official wants to be the one who gives a visa to an Al Qaeda operative, while there is no professional price for barring a professor with unpopular ideas or for making a graduate student miss a semester of school. (The number of foreign students admitted annually has declined in the past five years, though the State Department is trying to ease their visa process.) Living in the United States is a better advertisement for America than most of its foreign policies, but it is an increasingly difficult experience for foreigners to have.

The United States should grant Tariq Ramadan a visa, not because he has an inalienable right to one but in the interest of the national good. The continuing effort to keep him out is a strategic mistake, and it shows a depressingly familiar failure on the part of the Administration to grasp the nature of the conflict with Islamist radicalism. It is a struggle of ideas, played out around the world, and a figure like Ramadan, who can appeal to young Muslims on the basis of both group identity and tolerance, is a valuable interlocutor. Allowing him to assume his position at Notre Dame as Luce Professor of Religion, Conflict, and Peace-building would not necessarily improve Muslim-Western understanding (interfaith dialogue is overrated, as the Pope recently demonstrated). But it would reduce the "habits of hypocrisy and meanness" that Jefferson identified as the result of legislating against thought. Barring Ramadan makes the country that claims to represent the side of freedom in this struggle appear defensive, timorous, and closed.

—*George Packer*

GIZMO DEPT.
SMART, USELESS



Four years ago, three cheery gadget geeks—Dan Dubno, a.k.a. Digital Dan, the chief technologist at CBS News; his younger brother, Mike, then the chief technology officer at Goldman Sachs; and Greg Harper, an all-around tech wizard—met for a dinner that quickly escalated into a gadget showdown. Dan, or maybe it was Greg, drew a device from his pocket and said, "Have you seen this?" To which Greg, or Dan, producing an identical object, replied, "You mean this?" So it went for several minutes, until fifteen pounds of cutting-edge electronics were piled on the table, and a winner—no one can, or cares to, remember who—was declared.

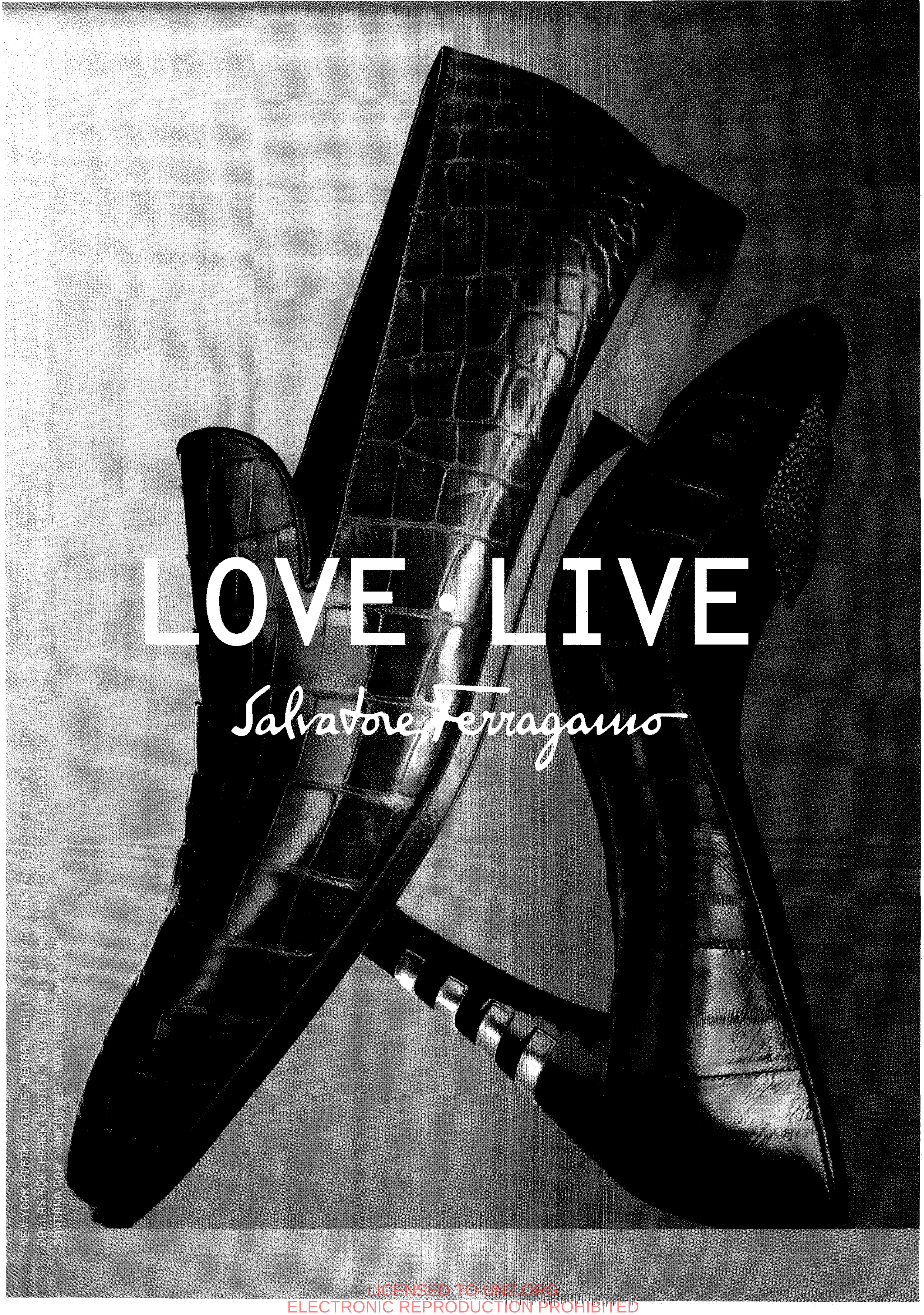
Thus was born Gadgetoff, an annual convocation of like-minded gear-heads. It is an exclusive, sub-radar affair that is devoted, as the motto goes, to "bringing the smart and the useless together." To get asked back, you had better show up with something neat-o. If someone bombed Gadgetoff, the future might cease to exist, or look too much like the present.

This year's Gadgetoff went down a few weeks ago on Governors Island, the abandoned, state-owned conundrum in New York Harbor. While fielding an array of private redevelopment proposals, Leslie Koch, the state's viceroy on the island, called in the Dubno brothers and their band of wacky geniuses, in the hope that a workable notion or two might drop to the ground. So it was that on a dismal rainy morning two hundred or so gadgeteers availed themselves of some unimprovable technologies—the ferry, the rain poncho—and took over the old island for a day.

There was something wonderfully incongruous about turning these futurists and their toys loose on the grounds of a derelict military base. The Gadgetoff headquarters, and any gizmos that could fit through a door, were in the Admiral's manse. A program of show-and-tell bits, each three and a half minutes long, was held in an abandoned church. Scattered about the island and its shores were four submarines, a helicopter, a hot-air balloon, and robots of various sizes and intents. Segways sped to and fro in the mist. There was a self-balancing skateboard, a smokeless cigarette, wicked-cool folding thingamajigs, and magic lock-picking keys, as well as presentations on a jet-powered Volkswagen Beetle, the growing sport of rocket racing, driverless S.U.V.s, and computer printers that "print" 3-D objects.

The person who perhaps best embodied the smart-and-useless parameter was Yossi Vardi, the tech investor and distinguished prankster, who had come to New York from Israel with his older brother Didi. Vardi, who is sixty-four, helped found ICQ, the Instant Messaging program. When asked what he planned to do with his three and a half minutes, he said, "I'm going to demonstrate how you can transfer data faster with snails than with broadband." He said that he had sixty PowerPoint slides, but, he warned, "PowerPoint presentations damage your brain. If you look at too many, you become immoral."

In the church, he presented meticulously researched, technically correct, but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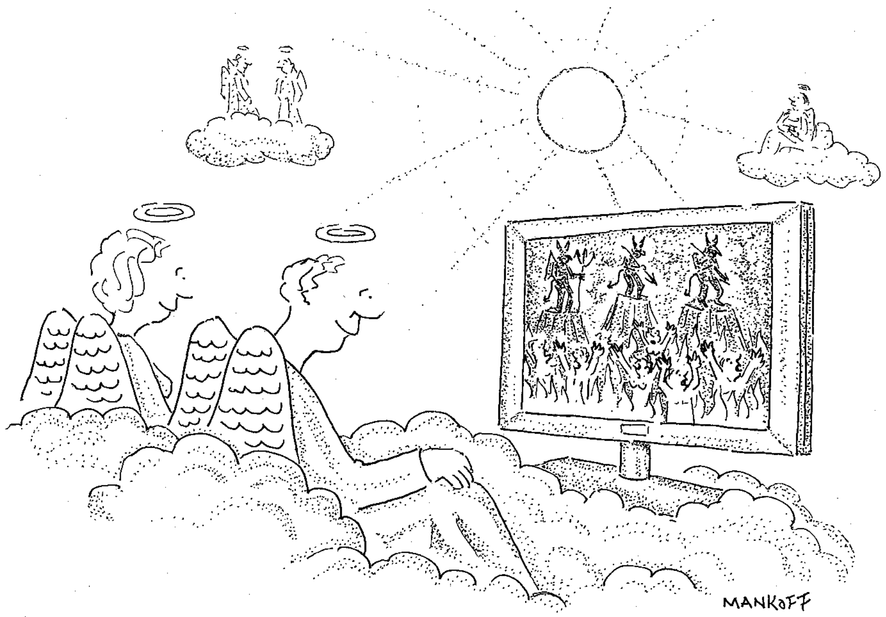


completely ridiculous charts and graphs. He compared various data-transfer systems: ISDN, ADSL, Wi-Fly (that is, pigeons). Then he showed a slide of a snail hitched to a tiny chariot with DVDs for wheels. If each disk contains 4.7 gigabytes of data, and if the snail (chasing a scrap of lettuce) travels at 0.000023 metres per second, the snail-system performance rate is over thirty-seven megabits per second. That blows ADSL out of the water. (There are flaws, however. As Vardi noted, "In some regions, most notably France, culinary habits may pose a denial-of-service problem.") Dubno rang a bell and shooed Vardi from the stage.

Vardi's work was not done. Earlier, he'd said, "You must see my brother's enormous vibrating-balls organ." He was referring, fortunately, to a musical device that Didi and his son Guy had designed; its chief component was four hundred colored golf balls. "It vibrated in Israel, it vibrated at Burning Man, and it will vibrate here," Yossi Vardi declared. Didi, who owns a hardware store near Tel Aviv, and who had previously designed a contraption that took half an hour to tear a sheet of toilet paper from a roll, nodded, and then he and his brother performed a little catechism.

"How long did you work on your vibrating balls?" Yossi asked.

"Four months."

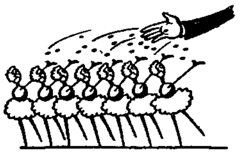
"And why did you work for four months on this useless piece of equipment?"

"We loved it."

Late in the day, the guests crammed into the Admiral's house for cocktails and gadgets. The Vardi device was on the back porch. It was about the size of a grand piano turned on its side, and it featured lasers, mirrors, wire coils, eight tambourines, and eight aluminum pipes. The balls passed through the coils, popped into the air, then bounced off the tambourines and against the pipes. Music. Meanwhile, inside, the gadgeteers were gathering for robot soccer.

—*Nick Paumgarten*

THE DANCING LIFE
MASTER CLASS

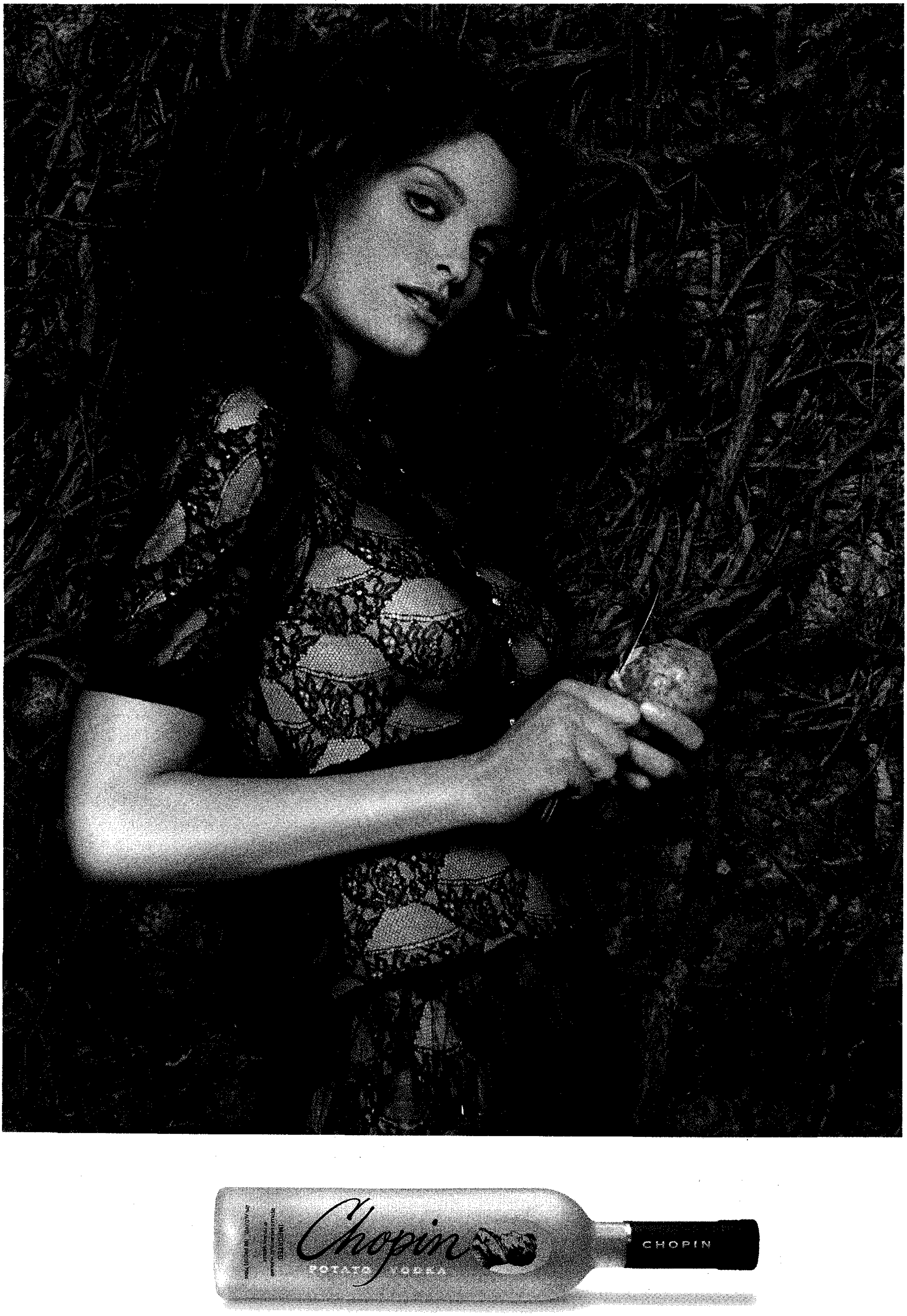


In her autobiography, the great Bolshoi ballerina Maya Plisetskaya describes the morning in 1937 when the authorities came to arrest her father: "The whole house upside down. My mother, unkempt, pregnant with a big belly, weeping and clutching. . . . My father, white as snow, dressing with trembling hands." The mother gave birth soon afterward. Eight months later, she, too, was arrested. She and her baby were sent to the Gulag, where they spent three years. The mother is dead now. The father, too: he was shot shortly after his arrest. As for the baby, Azari Plisetsky, he grew up to be a famous ballet teacher. Last month, he walked quietly into a studio at the Baryshnikov Arts Center, on West Thirty-seventh Street, to give a master class.

Plisetsky is an ordinary-looking sixty-nine-year-old man, with a bald head and a paunch. But the minute he took his position in front of the class his body changed. His spine elongated; his shoulders moved back; even his cheekbones seemed to rise. The drill he led was very hard, as a master class—also known as a *classe de perfectionnement*—is supposed to be. (Most of the students were professionals. David Hallberg and Veronika Part, both leading dancers at American Ballet Theatre, were there, humbly taking their lesson.) Many of the corrections he gave had to do with the most basic principles of ballet; above all, with how to initiate the movement—from the middle of the body, not from the extremities. One dancer was told to pick up her left buttock, as well as her right, before turning. The whole class was told to plié from the pelvis, not from the ankles, and to pirouette from both legs, not just from the back leg. This centering of movement is what makes ballet look "classical"—unified, harmonious, natural—but everybody has to be reminded of it constantly.

In addition to basics, Plisetsky worked on tiny details. He quoted his uncle Asaf Messerer, another celebrated teacher: "The most expressive part of the body of a dancer, it's the hand." He took the students carefully through the configuration of the fingers during a plié: one design, palms down, as they were going down, and another, palms up, as they were coming up. As is often the case with master teachers, Plisetsky performed the step more beautifully than any of his students. They looked on earnestly, and tried to copy him.

Plisetsky has spent most of his career outside Russia. He danced with the Bolshoi for six years, but then, in 1963, he was sent off to dance for his country's new friend, Cuba. "Azari was very good-looking," Mikhail Baryshnikov, who was translating for Plisetsky, said. "Also, very experienced partner," something that Alicia Alonso, the director of the Cuban National Ballet, needed in order to continue her dancing career, for she was going blind. "He danced with her ten years, non-stop." At the same time, he began teaching, and if, today, Cuban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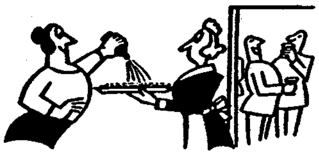
men are standouts in international ballet—virile but dignified, athletic but elegant—that is probably due in some measure to Plisetsky. Since Cuba, he has taught for other companies—his sister Maya's troupe in Madrid, Roland Petit's Ballet National de Marseille, Maurice Béjart's Ballet Lausanne (where he is still working)—but he speaks of the Cubans with a special love. "Temperament, they have," he said. "Dynamism." They also have strong popular dance traditions, which beef up their ballet. He remembers teaching a step, the pas de basque, to a class of young boys in Havana. One boy was sure he could do it. Plisetsky got up from his chair to show what the boy did. His hips swung and swayed and did figure eights. It was a rumba, with a pas de basque hidden in it. "No one is so naturally gifted in dancing as the Cubans," he said.

But how did he get to be a ballet teacher in the first place? Why was he accepted into the Bolshoi school, if the authorities had recently found it necessary to shoot his father and imprison his mother? "Well," he said, "at that time Maya was starting to dance." Then there was his uncle Asaf Messerer and his aunt Sulamith Messerer, both principal dancers with the Bolshoi. "So the names Messerer and Plisetsky become legal. They realize we are artists." He threw up his hands. "Oops, sorry!"

—*Joan Acocella*

FIELD TRIP
NIGELLA SHOPS



Nigella Lawson, Britain's most telegenic cook, was in town last week to talk about her new Food Network show, "Nigella Feasts." The Food Network hopes to duplicate Lawson's success as Britain's "domestic goddess" with the American masses. But is there a place for a domestic goddess in America's kitchen? That was the question hanging over the frigid air of a Gristede's at Ninth Avenue and Twenty-fourth Street, where Lawson spent an hour assisting a reporter in choosing the menu for a dinner party he wanted to throw for his wife's birthday. If her divinity could shine through the decidedly un-Olympian surroundings in which New Yorkers shop for supper, then she might have a shot here.

On arriving, Lawson said, inaccurately, "I look like a man in drag." She was wearing a black suède jacket, a long black skirt, black suède boots, and a blue cashmere sweater. She glided over the warped linoleum inside the automatic door, past refuse-filled shopping carts, and went straight to a rack of corn chips. "Everything is so big in America!" she said. "It makes Britain look like toytown."

Lawson is not a professional cook; her appeal derives, in part, from a tony background (her father was Margaret Thatcher's Chancellor of the Exchequer) and from her experience as a mother (she has two young children) and as the wife of the art collector Charles Saatchi (her first husband, John Diamond, died of throat cancer in 2001). Her specialty is comfort food, and what she calls "food kitsch"—for example, fried peanut-butter-and-banana sandwiches.

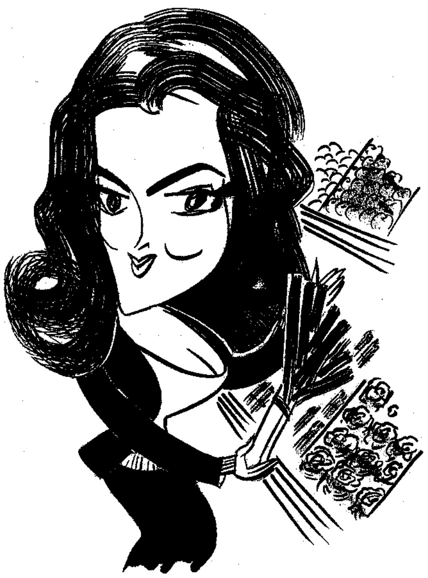
"Now, I would be quite happy with these thighs," Lawson said pensively, settling her fingertips on a package of chicken pieces. "Maybe with some honey and thyme. You can eat like Henry VIII."

She set off looking for an appetizer: "Surely they'll have a pumpkin, no?" No such luck. "Squash, then, turned into a salad with radicchio, feta, and parsley. And we'll roast some leeks and garlic cloves with the birds. Now, is there feta?"

She located the cheese case. "Blue-cheese crumbles! How extraordinary! One would have thought you could crumble it yourself." There was feta. "Now, if I could find some pecans"—pronounced "peck-ans"—"to give it a crunch I'd be very happy." But she could find no pecans. "I'll ask," said the reporter, who found himself wanting to make Lawson happy. But the only clerk was being berated by an elderly woman with a tripod cane because the Mallomars had been placed out of her reach. "Never mind!" Lawson said brightly. "No pecans! Let's think about dessert."

Gristede's was full of food kitsch, and Lawson kept getting distracted by it. The Pixie Crinkles in the frozen-food section caught her eye ("What's that?"), and she carefully studied the meat-loaf recipe on the back of a Heinz ketchup bottle. In Aisle 7, she picked up a jar of unearthly-looking blue cherries and said, with a helpless giggle, "They're awful, but I find myself drawn to them, and that's what I don't understand."

Lawson worked for many years as a journalist—she began at the *Times* of London—before becoming a food writer, and then "stumbled into making television." She claims that she is "mortified" by the "showgirl" she is forced to play on American talk shows, although she adds, "I admit I collude in the portrait. I really can't help but please."



Nigella Lawson

Making food provides Lawson with an elaborate double-entendre. She seldom wields a knife; the spoon is her utensil of choice (unless she can just use her hands), and, instead of cutting, she stirs and enfolds. In the first episode of her new show, the camera follows an egg yolk as it slides from its shell and into her palms while the egg white runs through her fingers. A microphone picks up the noise as she squirts ketchup into her "tangle" of meat and veg. When the dish is done, you half expect her to reach for a cigarette.

But on to dessert. "Because I'm sure you love your wife very much, you'll give her a cake," Lawson said. Naturally. She went to inspect the store-made cakes, near the deli counter. "Ouf," she said softly, recoiling from the honey-covered ham topped with bits of orange and pineapple. For a moment, it seemed as though the sight would render her mortal.

—*John Seabrook*

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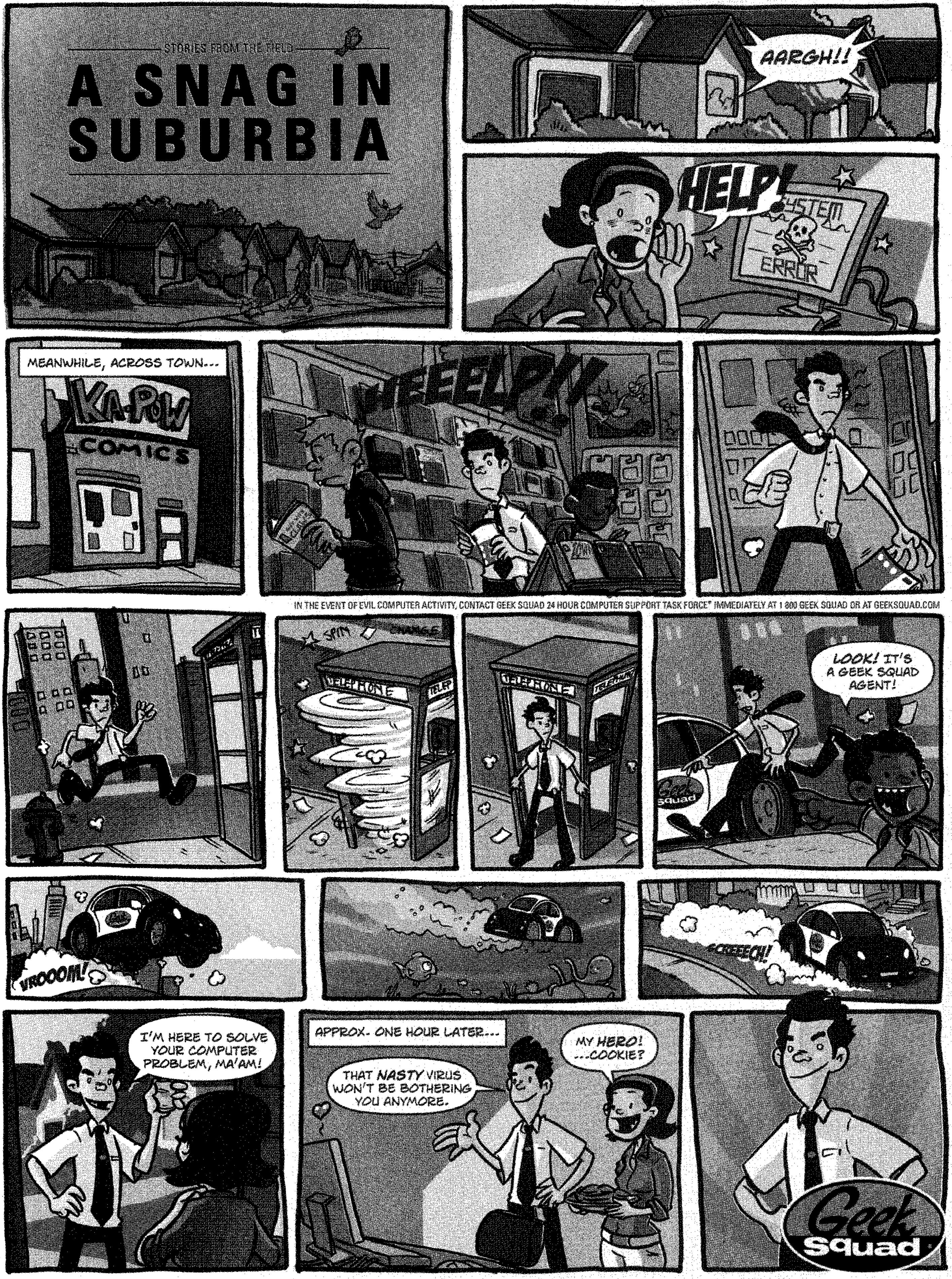
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THE FINANCIAL PAGE
STANDARD-BEARERS

In 1888, at Thomas Edison's laboratory, in West Orange, New Jersey, a macabre event took place. While reporters watched, dogs were placed on a metal plate that had been hooked up to a thousand-volt alternating-current generator and electrocuted one by one. Edison wanted to convince the public that alternating current (which was offered by a competitor, Westinghouse) was too dangerous to be used in the home, and his own direct-current technology should be the national standard for electricity.

Edison's tactics may have been extreme, but his purpose would have been readily understood by the marketers of Sony's Blu-ray technology and those of Toshiba's HD DVDs: both companies are trying to convince us that their product will be the standard high-definition successor to DVDs. Technological standards—like the compact disk, or the protocols that make the Internet function—are essential to the smooth running of a global economy. Yet standards themselves are determined in unstandardized ways. Sometimes they are the product of government mandate. (The European Union wanted one cell-phone standard for the continent, and now virtually all European cell phones use G.S.M. technology.) Sometimes a quasi-governmental organization or a technological consortium steps in, and sometimes deals are cut between companies. But sometimes companies that have spent billions developing new technologies decide to slug it out in the marketplace, just as Edison and Westinghouse did. Such fights are called standards wars—a familiar example is Betamax's defeat by V.H.S.—and the biggest standards war today is the one between Blu-ray and HD DVD.

Standards wars involve lots of variables, and understanding them often seems more an art than a science. They generally involve just two big players, and end in a winner-take-all situation. So whereas Coca-Cola and Pepsi can happily share the soda market, Microsoft Word now has ninety-five per cent of the word-processing market, and WordPerfect has almost none. Thus the rules that govern these wars are different from those of simple free markets.

The most important rule is that, as the economist Hal Varian says, "the product that people expect to win *will* win." Consumers know that if they back the loser in a standards war they'll be stuck with an obsolete product, so convincing them that your product is a winner is essential. Some economists argue that this means that quality is irrelevant in a standards war, but the historical record suggests that survival of the weakest is a rare occurrence. Betamax fans still extoll its superior picture quality, but for most consumers V.H.S. was the better product; Betamax tapes could fit only an hour's recording time, while V.H.S. could record an entire movie. Similarly, Edison's attempt to make direct current the industry standard failed because alternating current was more reliable and allowed electricity to travel longer distances. Ultimately, the best way to make people believe your product will win is to have a better product.

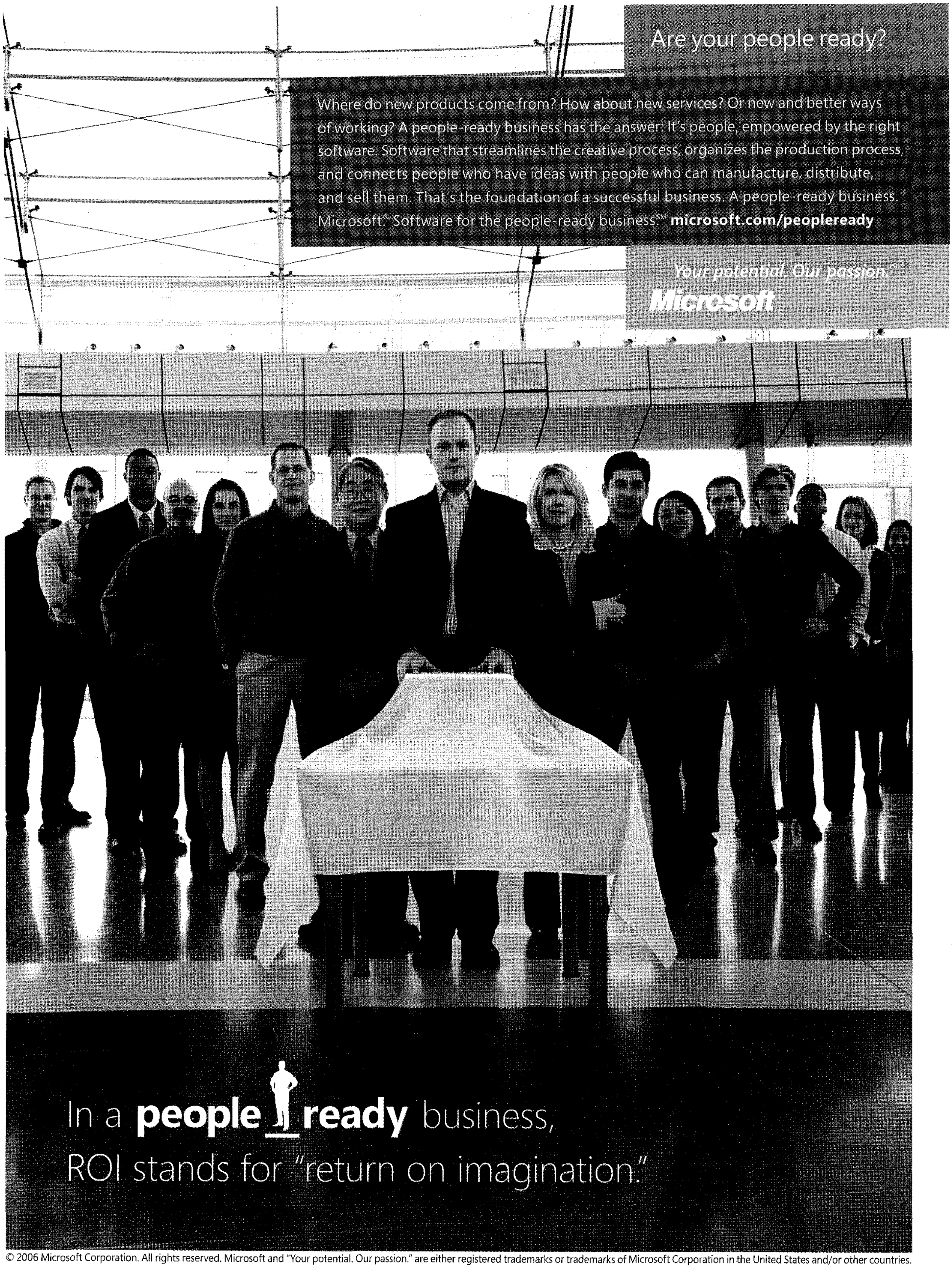
That isn't enough, though. It's essential to develop as many partnerships as possible with companies that make so-called "complementary goods." Sony's Playstation, for instance, became a huge success in part because there were simply so many more games available for it than for its competitors. Companies also need to get their products to market quickly, because, once a standard is established, it's difficult to dislodge. If someone buys a Blu-ray player and disks, he won't want to switch to HD DVD, and vice versa. But, while much has been written about the so-called "first mover advantage," the historical evidence for it is shaky. Alternating current was developed after direct current, V.H.S. followed Betamax, and RCA's color-TV technology (which eventually became the industry standard) was developed after CBS's. So you need to be fast but not necessarily first.

Both Sony and Toshiba appear to have taken these lessons, ambiguous as they are, to heart. Toshiba was first to market: HD DVD players appeared in the spring. But Sony made sure that Blu-ray machines appeared soon afterward. Sony has done a better job of making partners: it has signed exclusive deals with Disney and Fox, and almost every Hollywood studio is releasing Blu-ray disks. But Toshiba is the exclusive distributor of films for Universal, and has so far released more movies than Blu-ray has. Blu-ray's technology, which allows you to pack fifty gigabytes of data on a disk, is theoretically superior to that of HD DVD, which manages thirty. But for most users the differences in quality will probably seem negligible—movies look extraordinarily good on both machines—and Toshiba is offering its products at cheaper prices.

Curiously, though, a standards war in which both companies are avoiding obvious errors may not be in anyone's best interest. An extended standoff will likely make customers hesitate to buy either product, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in lost sales. And if it goes on long enough consumers may just decide to wait till they can download high-definition movies. The obvious solution to this impasse is negotiation. That's what happened with the original DVD—in the nineteen-nineties, a consortium of companies pooled patents and adopted a single standard. Sony and Toshiba did talk last year, but there's no sign that any kind of deal is in the works. Cutting a deal would require Sony and Toshiba to admit that they might lose the war, and right now neither company can afford to be seen to doubt its position. So they may end up staring at each other for a long time, and when, finally, someone blinks consumers may have forgotten what all the fuss was about.

—*James Surowiecki*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN



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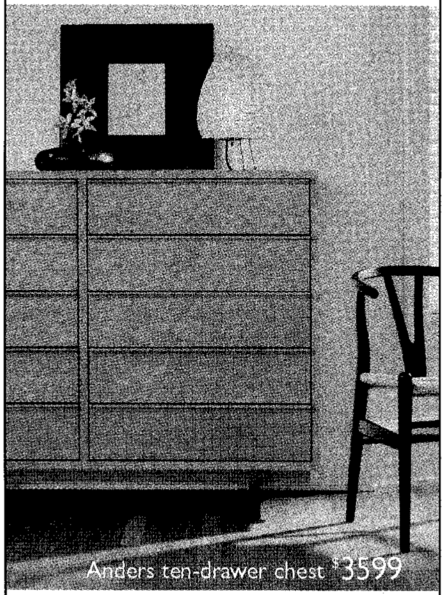

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Will he move left in 2008?

BY JOHN CASSIDY

Like the legendary press barons to whom he is often compared—Hearst, Pulitzer, Northcliffe, Beaverbrook—Rupert Murdoch has relished playing kingmaker. In the fall of 1977, when he was forty-six and had recently arrived in New York from Australia, by way of Fleet Street, he decided, as the new owner of the *Post* and *New York*, to endorse a candidate for the mayoralty. The city was in crisis: the treasury was empty; the serial killer Son of Sam had been terrorizing the five boroughs; the labor unions were threatening to strike; and seven Democratic candidates, including Mario Cuomo, Herman Badillo, and Ed Koch, were vying to succeed the hapless Abe Beame.

Murdoch invited them to his office. "Mario Cuomo was Governor Carey's candidate," Koch recalled recently. "And Rupert's preferred candidate, too, initially. Rupert asked each of us what we would do to take on the labor unions. Mario said, 'Trust me.' I said, 'I'll take a strike and I'll break it. If they go on strike, it will be illegal, and I'll defeat them.'"

Koch, then a liberal congressman from Greenwich Village, lacked both Cuomo's eloquence and Badillo's popularity in the outer boroughs. According to one poll, only four per cent of voters even knew who he was. "Rupert was impressed by what I said," Koch said. "But he wanted to endorse Mario nevertheless. So he gave him a chance to come back and see him again later in the week. Again, he asked him the same question. And Mario said the same thing: 'Trust me.'

"A day or two later, I was sitting at home. My campaign truck had broken down, so I couldn't go out campaigning. The phone rang and a voice said, 'Is Congressman Koch at home?' I didn't recognize the voice, so I said, 'Who's calling?' The person said, 'It's Rupert.' I said to myself, 'Rupert . . . Rupert . . . That's not a Jewish name. Who could this be?' Then I recognized the Australian accent. I said, 'Oh yes, *that* Rupert.'

"He said, 'Congressman, we will be endorsing you in the mayoral race. It will be on the front page of the *Post* tomorrow.' I said, 'Rupert, you just elected me.' And he had. The *Post's* endorsement transformed my campaign. I wouldn't have won without it."

Almost thirty years later, Murdoch is arguably the world's most powerful media executive. His company, News Corporation, owns the Fox Broadcasting network, the Twentieth Century Fox film studio, the book publisher HarperCollins, the *Post*, *The Weekly Standard*, MySpace, and part of DirecTV, the biggest satellite-television provider in the country. News Corp. also owns five British newspapers and more than a hundred and ten Australian newspapers, and controls satellite-television providers in Britain, Italy, and Asia.

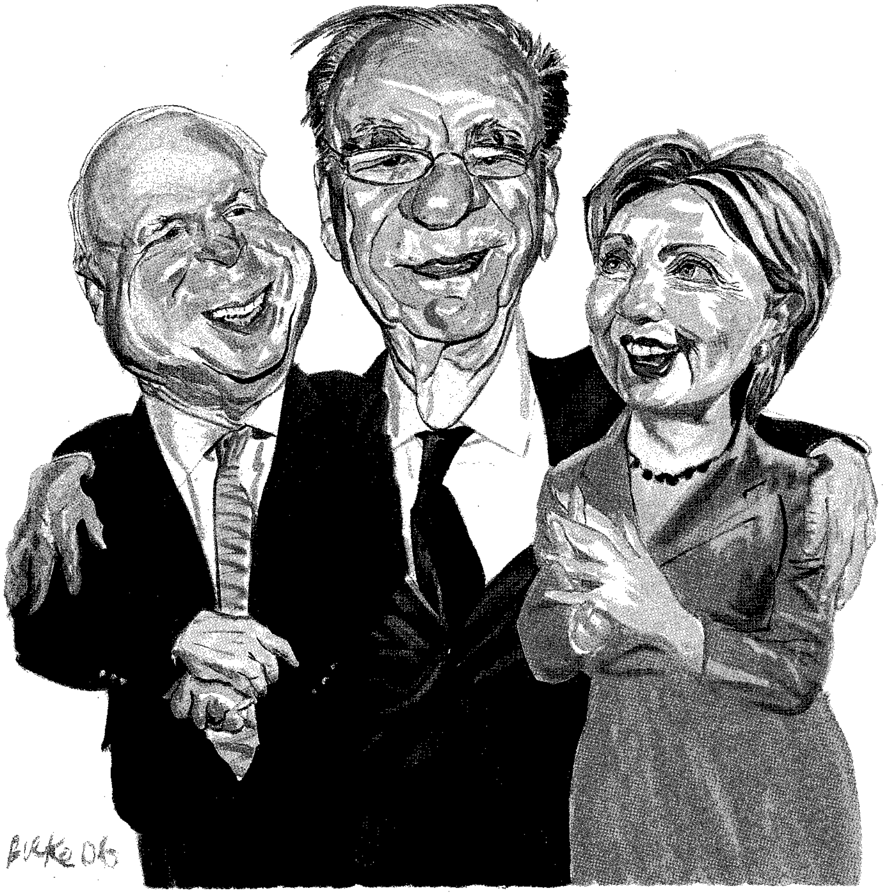
The success of Fox News Channel, which Murdoch launched in 1996, has secured his reputation as a strident conservative, so it came as a shock to both his right-wing allies and his liberal enemies when, in July, he hosted a fund-raising breakfast for Hillary Rodham Clinton. During the Clinton Administration, both the *Post* and Fox News pilloried the First Couple with a relish bordering on cruelty. (Page Six, the *Post's* famous gossip column, referred to the President as the "horndog-in-chief," and Sean Delonas, its editorial cartoonist, routinely depicted him in his underpants.) Since September 11th, Murdoch's media outlets have sometimes seemed like propaganda arms of the Bush Administration, skewering anybody who dares to question the President's war on terror. (Last year, Bill O'Reilly, one of Fox's most popular anchors, suggested that the American Civil Liberties Union and the "judges who side with them" are "terror allies." When the Abu Ghraib prison story broke, the *Post* didn't even put it on the front page.)

The fund-raiser for Hillary Clinton took place on July 17th, at News Corp.'s midtown tower, which houses the *Post* and Fox News. Among the News Corp. executives who attended were Roger Ailes, the veteran Republican operative who runs Fox News, and Col Allan, the pugnacious, Australian-born editor of the *Post*. Clinton spoke for about twenty minutes, and then took questions. The breakfast raised more than sixty thousand dollars for Clinton's senatorial reelection campaign—neither Ailes nor Allan contributed any money—and it led to speculation that Murdoch was preparing to endorse Hillary in the 2008 Presidential campaign.

Appearing on "The Charlie Rose Show" on July 20th, Murdoch said that an endorsement was "unlikely," which didn't exactly reassure conservatives. In August, they became more agitated after Murdoch played host to Bill Clinton and Al Gore at a News Corp. retreat in California. "The nature of the event . . . confirms our suspicion that Murdoch may be moving left as the 2008 U.S. presidential election approaches, and that he may bring his 'conservative' news properties with him," Cliff Kincaid, an editor at Accuracy in Media, a conservative watchdog group, commented on the organization's Web site.

Murdoch likes to keep people guessing about his intentions. On September 14th, the *Post* published a front-page story encouraging New York's mayor, Michael Bloomberg, to launch a Presidential bid. "RUN, MIKE, RUN," the headline read. "Americans like him for prez: poll." The poll in question happened to have been commissioned by the *Post* and Fox News, and at first glance its findings appeared to provide little support for Bloomberg. Asked whom they would vote for in a 2008 election featuring Hillary Clinton, John McCain, and Bloomberg running as an independent, forty per cent of the respondents said McCain, thirty-five per cent said Clinton, and fifteen per cent said Bloomberg. The respondents were then read a paragraph about Bloomberg, which described him as a "successful, self-made businessman," and were asked to vote again. This time, Bloomberg earned twenty-one per cent of the vote, indicating, to the *Post*, at least, that he was "perfectly positioned for a White House run."

I had lunch with Murdoch the day after the story appeared. We met outside his office, on the eighth floor of the News Corp. building, and rode the elevator down to an executive dining room on the third floor. The elevator car didn't have call buttons; you had to press the floor's number on a panel in the hallway before you got in. "Somebody put these new elevators in, and nobody knows how to use them," Murdoch complained. "The bloody landlord did it."



For now, Murdoch is on good terms with both McCain and Clinton.

PHILIP BURKE

At seventy-five, Murdoch looked as trim and energetic as he had the last time I had seen him, some years ago. (Between 1986 and 1995, I worked for two Murdoch newspapers, the London *Sunday Times* and the *Post*.) The lines on his face were deeper, and his gait was a bit slower, but his big black eyes were eager. After he had ordered fish and lemon-lime Gatorade from a uniformed waiter, I asked him about the Bloomberg story, which elicited a loud cackle. "That was just a bit of fun, that poll," Murdoch said. "He"—Bloomberg—"rang me today. And he said, 'You made my mother very happy, but I am not a candidate. I've got to run this city for the next eighteen months.' He's disowning all the speculation about the White House, saying it is just out-of-control aides talking too much. I'm told that's B.S. He's thinking about it all the time."

I asked Murdoch if he thought that Bloomberg would make a good President. "In some ways, very good," he replied. "He'd run a very efficient government. He's not frightened to have the best people around him. He doesn't worry about being overshadowed." Murdoch paused. "I would distrust him on taxes," he added. (Bloomberg has raised some city taxes.)

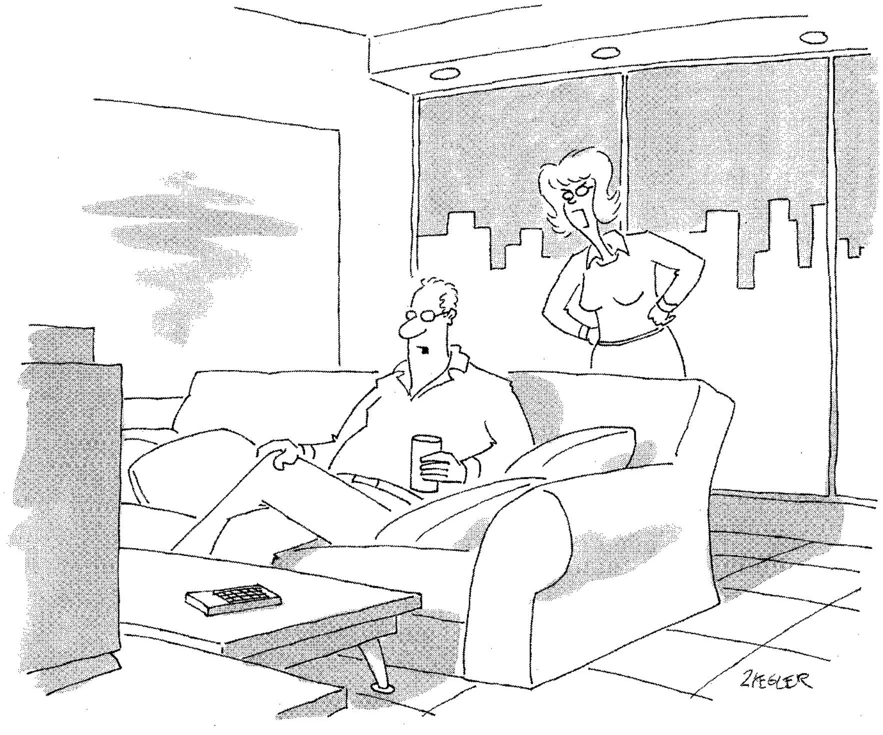
Murdoch loves to talk politics, and he is a news junkie. He spends a good part of each day calling his editors around the world. When I was an editor at the *Post*, I once took a call from Murdoch while he was on his yacht, somewhere off Italy. He had sneaked away from Anna, his wife at the time, who was trying to get him to take a real vacation. I told him about the latest developments in Washington, where the Republicans had recently taken control of Congress. He listened intently and said that he'd call back the next day, if he could.

Murdoch became an American citizen in 1985. Although his political instincts are staunchly conservative—he dislikes taxes and government programs; he's for a strong defense policy; he's suspicious of trade unions and regulators—he does not belong to either party. Since the early nineteen-fifties, when he kept a bust of Lenin in his study at Worcester College, Oxford, he has considered himself a maverick. "I wouldn't join the clubs," he said. "I don't ever want to be in a position where people can pressure me to do something. I have fewer close friends than most people. But I think that's the right thing. You have to keep yourself somewhat detached."

This detachment makes him an irresistible target for ambitious politicians of all parties, but also an elusive one. Even if Bloomberg runs for President in 2008, Murdoch probably won't end up supporting him, because he doesn't think the Mayor has much chance of winning. As Murdoch explained, "If he made a good impression in the debates and ran a good television campaign, it's conceivable that he could win a few states. I don't see anything more than that, but you never know."

It is no coincidence that Murdoch is on friendly terms with the politicians who are favored to win their parties' nominations in 2008: McCain and Clinton. "I like McCain," he said. "We always get on very well. I think in many ways he's a great American. People say he has a very short temper, but I've not seen that." Nevertheless, Murdoch insisted that he was not ready to make an endorsement. "It's a long way away," he said of 2008. "I'm not backing anybody. We have a good relationship with Hillary. She has been a good senator. She's been tireless in working for the people of New York, as has Chuck Schumer"—the state's senior senator—"and she was very impressive when she came in for breakfast." Later, he added, "She was very, very gutsy originally on the war in Iraq, and she has tried to rival Al D'Amato"—the former New York senator—"in being Senator Pothole. She's really built a base here, which people didn't think was possible. She has amazing energy."

I asked Murdoch whether he thought that Hillary would make a good President. "I don't know," he replied. "She's very intelligent. I think she'd be decisive. She may be more decisive than Bill was. If you go on her history, I would say she would be a lot more liberal than I am, but I don't know. If she makes it, we'll see."

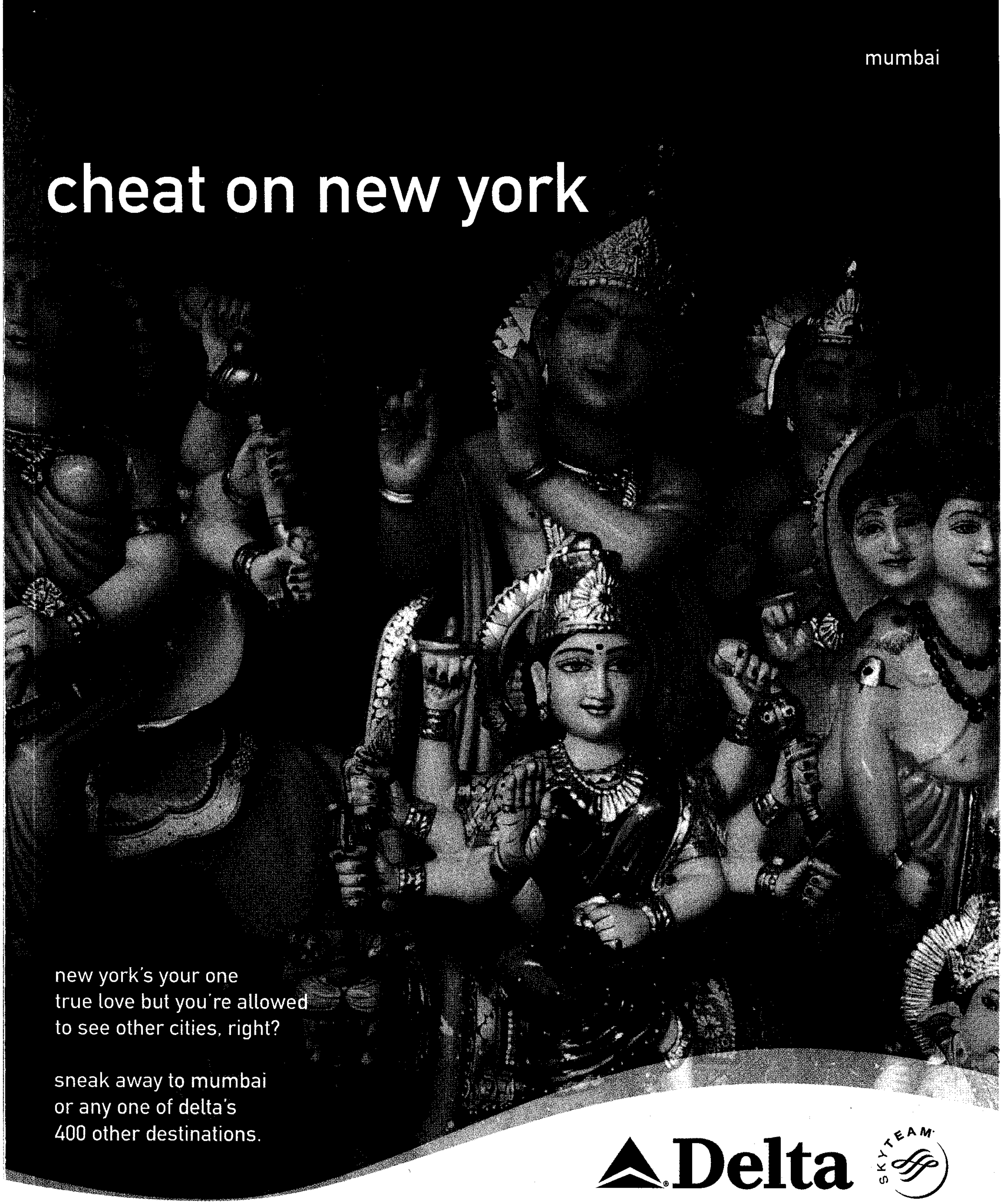


"You might want to save that for your blog."

Irwin Stelzer, an economic consultant based in Washington, is almost the same age as Murdoch, and has known him since the mid-nineteen-seventies, when they both spent summer weekends in the village of Old Chatham, in upstate New York. In Britain, where Stelzer spends a lot of time, he is sometimes described as Murdoch's emissary, although he also runs a consulting company and writes a column for the *Sunday Times*. Stelzer told me, "Rupert will call me on a Sunday, and we'll spend two and a half hours on the phone, on questions that range from why did the Fed raise interest rates—he's usually against that—to what do you think of the latest move by the Chinese government, to is Gordon Brown"—the British Chancellor of the Exchequer and a likely candidate for Prime Minister—"really a socialist? People say, 'Is Rupert going to the left? Is he going to the right?' That's the wrong way of looking at it. He's going in a direction where the conversation is most interesting."

Recently, Murdoch has spent a lot of time talking to Bill Clinton. In the summer of 2002, the former President was at a party in New York and ran into Gary Ginsberg, a forty-four-year-old attorney who had worked in his first Administration as a White House counsel and as a Justice Department official. Ginsberg joined News Corp. in 1999, and he holds the title of executive vice-president of corporate affairs. Clinton had been reading the *Post* since he moved to New York, and the paper was still making fun of him. ("I'm sick and tired of being a goddam punching bag for the New York *Post*," he reportedly told an associate.) He told Ginsberg that he had been trying to arrange a meeting with Murdoch but hadn't succeeded.

Ginsberg told Murdoch that Clinton wanted to get together. In October, 2002, he accompanied Murdoch to a meeting with Clinton at his office, on 125th Street. "They hit it off," Ginsberg said. "It was about a three-hour lunch. The conversation spanned the world—foreign policy, domestic issues, eco-



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"Relax. I'm only here to see my osteopath."

nomics, pretty much everything. Rupert was very impressed, I think." Murdoch confirmed this when I asked him about Clinton. "Well, he's enormously charming and winning," he said. "Nobody can stand up to his charm. He's very, very bright, and he's got an encyclopedic mind. He can talk interestingly about anything. You can't help but enjoy spending time with him."

In early 2003, Clinton startled many *Post* reporters by touring the newsroom with Murdoch and Col Allan. Since then, Murdoch and Clinton have seen each other once or twice a year, and the former President has remained on good terms with the *Post's* editors. "There is a better dialogue today than there has been, and that's a good thing," Allan said. "We are not always going to agree with him, but we respect him as a former President and as a very smart person." Last month, when a number of Clinton's former aides complained to ABC about his depiction in a miniseries about September 11th that the network was planning to broadcast, the *Post*, apparently tipped off by Clinton's office, put their objections on its front page. "Only two papers in the country had that story," Allan boasted. "The Washington *Post* and us."

Better relations with the Murdoch media serve several of Clinton's objectives. Through News Corp., Murdoch has donated half a million dollars to the Clinton Climate Initiative, part of the former President's ambitious effort to address problems such as poverty, AIDS, and global warming. "It is President Clinton's style that he doesn't have sworn enemies," Jay Carson, Clinton's spokesman, told me. "On many issues, President Clinton's politics are diametrically opposed to those of Rupert Murdoch, but you can disagree on most things and coöperate on others."

Clinton also knows that his friendship with Murdoch has helped to improve his wife's image in the Murdoch media. By cultivating that relationship, Clinton has potentially neutralized one element of the "vast right-wing conspiracy" that Hillary referred to in 1998. Two years later, when she moved to New York and ran for the Senate, she again found herself under attack by the conservative media. "To vote for Hillary Rodham Clinton is to affirm double-dealing and deception," the *Post's* editorial page warned. Michael Tomasky, a liberal journalist who covered the campaign for *New York*, counted seven positive editorials and columns about Clinton in the *Post*, seventeen neutral pieces, and two hundred and twelve negative ones.

When Allan arrived from Australia, in the spring of 2001, the relationship between the paper and Hillary Clinton was antagonistic. "I didn't sit down and think, We have got to have a better relationship with the Clintons," Allan said. "But I did gradually develop an appreciation of the work Hillary was doing for New York as the junior senator. I have been very impressed by her work ethic and her care for her constituents."

Allan talks to Murdoch most days. Under his editorship, the balance of positive and negative stories about Hillary has shifted dramatically. When she introduces a new legislative initiative, or attacks the White House, the *Post* usually reports it straight. Sometimes, such as when, in August, she gave her clearest hint yet that she would run for the White House in 2008, she lands on the front page.

The *Post's* approval of the Clintons is not unconditional. Recently, the editorial page assailed Hillary for supporting the antiwar candidate Ned Lamont, who defeated Senator Joseph Lieberman in Connecticut's Democratic primary. And, earlier this year, after a scandal erupted over the alleged attempt by a reporter for Page Six to extort Bill Clinton's friend Ron Burkle, a California supermarket magnate, the *Post* twice returned to its old characterization of him, calling him the "former horndog-in-chief." Clinton was furious. His aides complained to Allan on the ground that the description demeaned the office of the Presidency. The references ceased.

Ed Koch is not the only progressive politician Murdoch has helped get elected. In the late nineteen-sixties, after he had taken over the family newspaper business—his father, Sir Keith Murdoch, owned several papers in Australia—he broke with the Liberal Party, which was the party of the Australian financial establishment, and rallied his papers behind Gough Whitlam, the charismatic leader of the Australian Labor Party. Whitlam served as Prime Minister from 1972 to 1975, and introduced many liberal reforms, among

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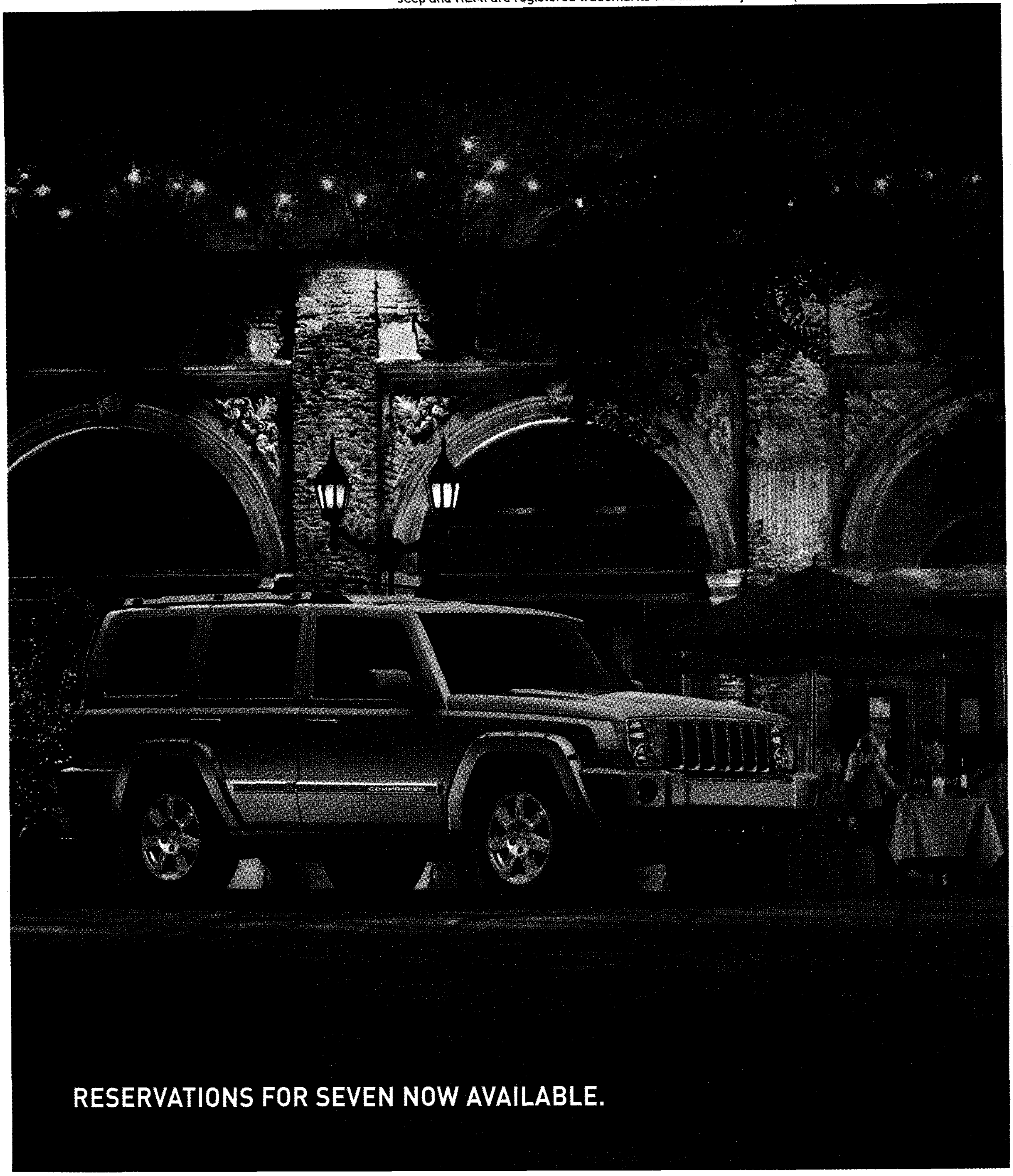
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them abolishing the death penalty for federal crimes and promoting equality for women and Aborigines. "He did some good things, Gough," Murdoch said to me.

Murdoch's papers eventually turned on Whitlam, but in the nineteen-eighties and nineties they supported two more Labor Prime Ministers: Bob Hawke, a former trade-union leader, and Paul Keating, a forward-thinking technocrat who tried to end Australia's ties to the British Crown. (Australia is still part of the Commonwealth and thus technically under the rule of Queen Elizabeth II.)

At the same time, Murdoch was urging his British papers to promote Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Party leader, who was Prime Minister from 1979 to 1990. The *Sun*, a jingoistic News Corp. tabloid that sells more than three million copies a day, praised Thatcher's proposals to slash income taxes, confront the trade unions, and privatize publicly owned enterprises. "I thought that what she was trying to do was basically right," Murdoch told me. "Some of the methods she used were wrong. But you have to give her credit for the fact that she was in a minority in the Cabinet for the whole time she was there."

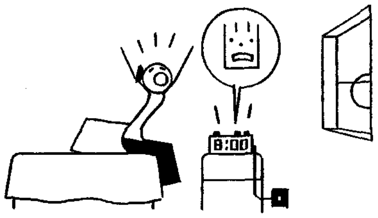
Without the support of Murdoch's papers, which relentlessly attacked the opposition Labour Party, the Conservatives would have struggled to remain in power. On the day of the 1992 general election, when Neil Kinnock, who was then Labour's leader, was challenging Thatcher's successor, John Major, the *Sun* printed a picture of a light bulb on its front page next to a headline that read, "IF KINNOCK WINS TODAY WILL THE LAST PERSON TO LEAVE BRITAIN PLEASE TURN OUT THE LIGHTS?" (Major won the election.)

When Tony Blair took over as the head of the Labour Party, in 1994, he was understandably eager to court Murdoch's favor. According to Andrew Neil, who was then the editor of the *Sunday Times*, Murdoch and Blair first met in September, 1994, at Mosimann's, an expensive club in Belgravia. "The dinner went very well," Neil wrote in his 1996 memoir, "Full Disclosure." "Blair discovered Rupert was not the ogre his party had painted, and Rupert found what Blair had to say a refreshing change from the usual Labour nostrums. Blair indicated that media ownership rules would not be onerous under Labour, Rupert that his newspapers were not wedded to the Tories." After Blair left, Murdoch remained at the club chatting with colleagues, including Neil. "Well, he certainly says all the right things," Murdoch remarked. "But we're not letting our pants down just yet."

In 1995, Blair travelled nine thousand miles to Hayman Island, on the Great Barrier Reef, to deliver a keynote address at a News Corp. retreat. In the speech, he described himself as a radical modernizer, and as the natural heir to Margaret Thatcher. This time, Murdoch, who was tiring of Major and his scandal-plagued government, was receptive. "By the end of 1995," Neil wrote, "Rupert's editors were in little doubt that Blair was his man."

During the 1997 general election campaign, the *Sun* and the *News of the World*, Murdoch's Sunday scandal sheet, backed Blair. (The *Times* and the *Sunday Times*, which have greater editorial independence, stuck with the Tories.) After Blair's victory, which ended eighteen years of Conservative rule, Murdoch became a frequent visitor to Downing Street, although neither side publicized the meetings. In 2001 and 2005, most of the Murdoch papers supported Blair for reëlection, helping to make him the most successful leader of the Labour Party since its inception, in 1900.

Murdoch and Blair remain on friendly terms, even though Blair's support for the war in Iraq and for President George Bush have gravely undermined his popularity. (Last month, he announced that he would leave office within a year.) On July 28th, Blair flew to San Francisco on a trip that was described as an effort to promote British technology companies. Many of the British reporters who accompanied him knew better. "The real reason he is here now is because Rupert Murdoch invited him here to meet with all of his executives," Nick Robinson, the BBC's political editor, told KCBS, a Bay Area radio station, referring to the News Corp. retreat that Murdoch was hosting in Pebble Beach that week.



News Corp. has been holding corporate retreats sporadically since the nineteen-eighties, but there hadn't been one since 1998. This year's conference lasted five days, and it was the grandest yet. Dozens of security men with walkie-talkies and guns had secured the Pebble Beach resort against potential terrorists (and reporters from rival media organizations). Two hundred and sixty-five executives and their spouses flew in from around the world. Among them were News Corp. veterans such as Jane Friedman, the head of HarperCollins, Roger Ailes, and Col Allan, along with Chris DeWolfe and Tom Anderson, the founders of MySpace, the social-networking Web site, which News Corp. bought last year.

Gary Ginsberg, the principal organizer of the conference, had put together a list of speakers that included McCain, Newt Gingrich, Al Gore, Shimon Peres, Lawrence Summers, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Blair delivered the opening-night speech. "Rupert, it's great to be back at the News Corp. Conference after all these years," he began. "When I first met you, I wasn't sure I liked you, but I feared you. Now that my days of fighting elections are over, I don't actually fear you, but I do like you."

On August 2nd, the second-to-last day of the conference, Bill Clinton arrived. That afternoon, he played a round of golf with Ginsberg and Col Allan. With the help of several mulligans, he shot in the eighties. Then he attended a dinner for the conference participants, where he sat between Murdoch and his wife, Wendi, a thirty-seven-year-old former executive at Star TV, whom Murdoch married in 1999. The Murdochs' table was cordoned off in a V.I.P. area, but Clinton mingled with the rest of the guests after he had eaten. When Murdoch and his wife retired for the evening, shortly before midnight, the former President, surrounded by people, was listening to a performance by the Australian singer Keith Urban and his band.

The next morning, Clinton began his

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speech, about the political implications of globalization, by thanking Murdoch and the band. "I thought they were fabulous last night, and I had a great time," he said. "I don't get to have that much fun anymore. When I was in politics, we always tried to invoke Clinton's First Law, which is: 'Whenever you are having a good time, you probably should be somewhere else.'"

Conspicuously absent from Pebble Beach were any senior members of the Bush Administration. Despite the close ties between Fox News and the White House—Tony Snow, one of the channel's former commentators, is now the White House press secretary—Murdoch is not one of the President's intimates. "People think I must be close to George Bush," he said to me. "I tell you, I've been to one state dinner, as a result of being put on the list by the Australian Prime Minister. I stood in the reception line and shook the President's hand. And that was my total lifetime experience with George Bush."

In the eighties, Murdoch's newspapers enthusiastically supported Ronald Reagan, but Murdoch regarded his successor, George H.W. Bush, as a tax-raising member of the East Coast establishment. In the early nineties, Murdoch's main contacts in Washington were with outspoken Republicans on Capitol Hill, such as Al D'Amato and Newt Gingrich. In 1995, he put up the money to launch *The Weekly Standard*, the neoconservative magazine founded by Bill Kristol, Fred Barnes, and John Podhoretz. "Rupert calls once every few weeks, and we chat about politics," Kristol told me. "I would say he's a pragmatic conservative. He's pro-markets, and pro-defense, but he's not a movement conservative. He respects people like my father"—Irving Kristol—"Bill Buckley, and Norman Podhoretz, but he moves in different circles."

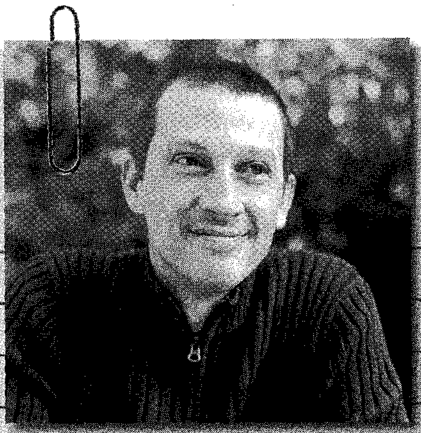
Murdoch's closest confidant is his wife, Wendi, with whom he has two young daughters. (He has four adult children from his two previous marriages.) After he met Wendi, people who worked for him noticed that he was dressing in black polo shirts and casual jackets instead of Savile Row suits. The Los Angeles *Times* recently reported that Wendi, who is Chinese, had hired experts to decorate the California headquarters of DirecTV according to the precepts of feng-shui.

Wendi's influence on Murdoch's views is a matter of speculation within News Corp. In the past few years, he has become more amenable to progressive arguments about gun control and global warming. "I'm always interested in new ideas," Murdoch said. "It's what keeps me young." He recently announced his intention to make the entire company "carbon neutral," and he has agreed, along with Barbra Streisand and Anson Beard, a retired Wall Street investment banker, to help fund the Clinton Foundation's Climate Initiative, which has enlisted major cities around the world in an effort to reduce emissions. Murdoch told me that his youngest son, James, who is thirty-three, persuaded him to take global warming seriously. "I'm still a bit more skeptical than most people," he said. "But if there is even a thirty-percent chance that the experts are right, we should do everything we can to insure against a bad outcome."

It would be a mistake to exaggerate Murdoch's liberal tendencies, however. "I'm a radical in the sense of supporting change," he said. "I also believe in free markets and in family values—in a low-key way. I'm not one to preach about it, having been married three times. But I really believe that the family is the basis of society." Murdoch backs Bush's tax cuts, and favors further cuts in welfare spending. All of his major newspapers endorsed the invasion of Iraq—a decision he stands by. "Well, like everybody else, I think there have been some terrible mistakes in execution," he said. "Repeated mistakes. But I really believe that we were right to go in and cannot pull out. We have to win this thing, and settle it in some way."

The rise of militant Islam both fascinates and terrifies Murdoch. He told me that he had been reading "Future Jihad," a book by Walid Phares, an American political scientist of Lebanese descent, who warns that foreign jihadis and their American sympathizers are almost certainly mobilizing inside the United States. "These people intend to change civilization, and they are prepared to take

"I never thought I'd be saying this, but enough with the snuggling already!"



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a hundred years to do it," Murdoch said. "We keep having to speak politically correctly about it, saying Muslims are wonderful, it's just a tiny minority. They are not all terrorists, of course, but the frightening thing is that it is the children of those good original immigrants who are being brainwashed in big numbers."

Murdoch takes a hard line on Iran, too: he supports the idea of threatening military strikes to prevent the Ahmadinejad regime from acquiring enriched nuclear material. "There are no easy solutions," he said. "We can't invade the place, so it's a matter of bombing and probably killing an awful lot of people. If you could really end the nuclear program for good, you might be forced to do that. It would be a lesson to other countries."

Hillary Clinton, who has been attacked by the left for her support of the Iraq war, has been reluctant to talk about her relationship with Murdoch, but her spokesman, Philippe Reines, said, "Senator Clinton respects him and thinks he's smart and effective." Like her husband, Hillary has been courting Murdoch's media outlets. In April, she attended a party celebrating the tenth anniversary of "Fox News Sunday" and chatted with Bill O'Reilly and Tony Snow. However, many people around the Clintons still regard Murdoch with suspicion. "Rupert, I think, is interested in power and money, and not much else," a former White House aide who worked with Hillary when she was First Lady said to me. "I think the ideology business is all a gloss. My vulgar Marxist view is that he is trying to defend his economic interest. The Democrats are about to sweep New York, and Hillary might be President in 2008."

Certainly, Lord Palmerston's description of nineteenth-century England applies to Murdoch's empire: it has no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies, only permanent interests. In 1996, when News Corp. was seeking to do business in China, Murdoch cancelled the publication by HarperCollins of a book by Chris Patten, the former governor of Hong Kong, criticizing the Beijing regime.

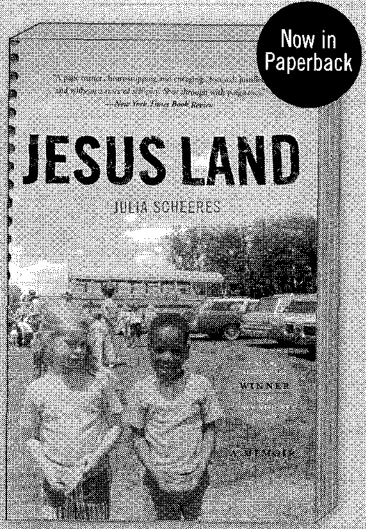
"He's savvier, and he has far better understanding of how to influence government, than anybody else I've ever met in the media," Reed Hundt, a former chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, the body that regulates the broadcasting industry, told me. "He's just smarter about that than everybody else."

Hundt was the chairman of the F.C.C. from 1993 to 1997. Shortly after the Senate confirmed him, Murdoch invited Hundt to his Bel Air estate, which was once owned by Jules Stein, the founder of M.C.A. At the time, Fox wanted to purchase more television stations, but it was running up against F.C.C. ownership rules. When Hundt arrived for dinner, Murdoch escorted him outside. "We were overlooking Los Angeles, the stars were out, and I was thinking, This is a scene from 'Faust.' I was thinking about Mephistopheles," Hundt recalled. "But he didn't say anything like 'This is what I want.' He just said, 'This is what we are doing, this is what we are about.' He was just completely and utterly gracious."

Some time later, Murdoch flew to Washington to see one of Hundt's juniors, an official who headed the F.C.C.'s bureau that regulates commercial satellites. News Corp. was thinking about buying a satellite-television company. (It eventually bought a controlling stake in DirecTV, but not until 2003.) "Rupert himself came and sat down with that person," Hundt said. "Rupert wanted to make sure that he understood on a personal level the direction of policy, but what he was also saying—and he never actually said this, because he didn't need to say it—was that he was open to this guy. That kind of thing has a huge impact on a government official at any level."

In 1994, in response to complaints from NBC and the N.A.A.C.P., Hundt launched an investigation of Fox, which ultimately determined that the company had violated laws governing foreign ownership of networks. (Fox announced plans to restructure, though News Corp. remained based in Australia until 2004.) Murdoch was furious about the investigation. In statements that he released to the press, he accused Hundt of "using clearly prejudicial procedures," and of trying to "hurt us." Hundt found himself being attacked by Republicans in Congress and, later, by Murdoch's media outlets. "When you talk to most media

JESUS LAND



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owners, they say, 'You can talk to me, but I don't have any influence on the editorial side.' With Rupert, you don't have that pretense," Hundt said. "You know, and he knows, that, if he likes you, you are going to get both news and editorial coverage that is different than if he doesn't like you. For that reason, he creates more power for himself than his peers. You know that there are favors that can be granted and punishments that can be handed out."

I asked Hundt if he was surprised that Murdoch was on such friendly terms with the Clintons. "I think it is completely consistent with his previous behavior," he replied. "Rupert has amply demonstrated that he's quite willing and able to work with any political party or politician that he thinks is going to be influencing policy. If he can be cozy with Tony Blair and the Chinese Communist Party, the Clintons aren't even a stretch."

Murdoch's political maneuverings are closely monitored inside News Corp. Like an eighteenth-century French monarch, he is surrounded by courtiers, with numerous factions, both conservative and progressive, vying for his favor. The News Corp. conservatives include many senior figures at Fox News, the *Post*, and Murdoch's British newspapers. They tend to downplay the significance of their boss's flirtation with the Clintons, describing the *Post's* sympathetic attitude to local Democrats, such as Hillary, as an inevitable reaction to the comatose state of the New York Republican Party under Governor George Pataki. In the recent Democratic primaries, the paper endorsed Eliot Spitzer for governor and Andrew Cuomo for state attorney general. Col Allan said, "Our coverage of the G.O.P. in New York shouldn't be misunderstood as the paper twisting left in any way. We have been criticizing the New York G.O.P., and it is difficult to do that without criticizing the Governor. We've said he went to sleep at the wheel."

Murdoch is scathing about Pataki. "I don't know about George," he said to me. "He was just lazy to start with. And then he started thinking about how to get reëlected. He was prepared to do a deal with his natural enemies, particularly the big state unions who overstaff many state functions."

Still, some conservative News Corp. journalists think that Murdoch has gone mushy. "I don't think Rupert is turning into a liberal—I just think he is becoming more of an establishmentarian as he gets older," one News Corp. editor said to me. "He's not the great rebel that he was in the eighties and nineties."

The News Corp. progressives—they don't like to be called liberals—are less visible in public, but they have greater access to Murdoch on a daily basis. They include his deputy Peter Chernin; the two co-chairs of Fox's film division, Tom Rothman and Jim Gianopulos; and Gary Ginsberg, whom Murdoch refers to as his "ambassador to the Clinton Administration." (Murdoch has told associates that it was Ginsberg who persuaded him to hold the fund-raiser for Hillary.)

If Murdoch did decide to support Hillary, he would meet resistance from his editors, starting with Col Allan. Although the editor of the *Post* has kind words for her over-all performance as senator, he is unhappy about some of her actions, such as her endorsement of Ned Lamont. Allan said to me, "We look forward to hearing her explain, perhaps in a Presidential campaign, exactly what her position on the war is. She has stated that she supports our troops in Iraq. Unless I'm mistaken, she voted to give the President authority to use military action in Iraq."

Bill Kristol has a written guarantee of editorial independence, and he is unlikely to go easy on Hillary. If Murdoch no longer wanted to be associated with the contents of *The Weekly Standard*, which loses more than a million dollars a year, his only options would be to sell it or close it down. Recently, there has been gossip in Washington that Murdoch was considering selling the magazine, but he dismissed the idea. "I've just read half of this week's issue," he said. "It's always interesting."

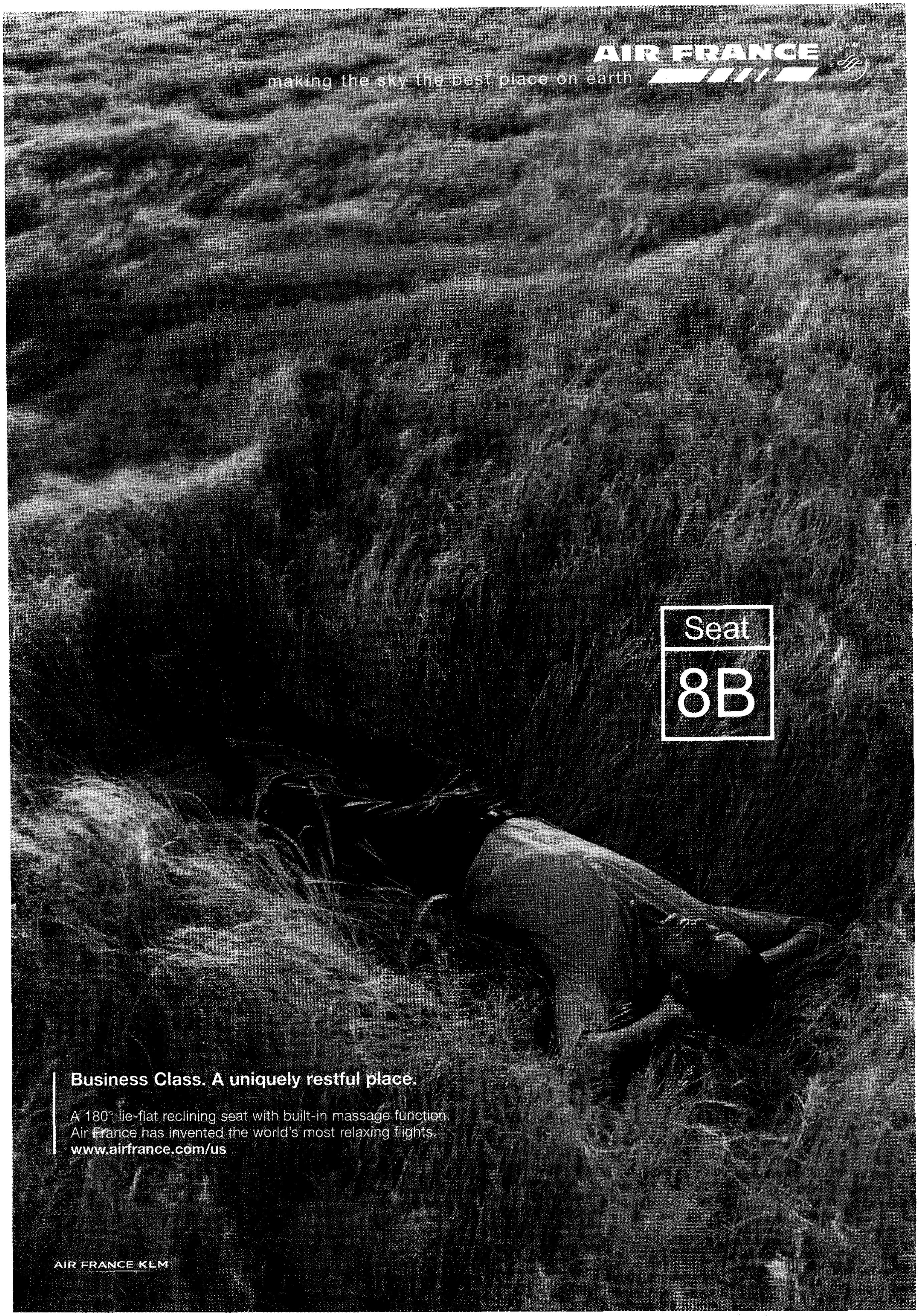
The most intriguing case is Fox News, which owes a good deal of its success to its saturation coverage of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. It is virtually inconceivable that Murdoch would risk alienating the conservative viewers who enable the channel to make an annual profit of hundreds of millions of dollars, but there are steps he could take, short of ordering Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity to be nice to Hillary. In 2004, Fox did terrible damage to John Kerry's campaign by devoting airtime to the Swift Boat controversy for weeks on end. If Hillary emerges as the Democratic candidate in 2008, there will doubtless be similar attempts by right-wing groups to attack her credibility. Should Fox prove less receptive to these efforts, the campaign could unfold very differently.

When I suggested to Murdoch that many people believe that his business interests dictate his politics, he reacted angrily. "Go ask Ed Koch if I ever asked him for anything," he said. "Go ask Margaret Thatcher. Go ask Tony Blair. Ask anyone if I ever asked for anything."

Koch told me that Murdoch did once ask for something: during a newspaper strike in 1978, he requested, through an intermediary, that the *Post's* delivery trucks be allowed to use the city's parkways. Koch said yes. (He offered the city's other newspapers similar access.) The Thatcher government provided Murdoch with crucial police support when he fired hundreds of print-union workers, in 1986, and Blair relaxed the Labour Party's policy on media ownership. But it would be inaccurate to portray Murdoch's relationships with political leaders as purely business arrangements. "They say Rupert talks to Tony Blair to protect his company," Irwin Stelzer said. "Maybe there's a small element of that, but that's not what drives him. It's about affecting events."

For the past decade and a half, Murdoch has been trying to fend off what he sees as the encroachment of a European superstate. One of the reasons he turned against John Major was that Major wanted Britain to establish closer ties with the European Community. "I thought that was abdicating responsibility to unaccountable bureaucrats in Brussels," Murdoch told me. "And I still think that. There are good things about Europe, such as a unified market, but that's a different matter. To give social policy, legal policy, human rights, and so on over to some anonymous body is crazy."

Tony Blair was pro-Europe, too, when he came to office, but many British commentators, including some of his own former aides, believe that he modified his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policies to satisfy Murdoch. "Blair was very keen to join the European monetary system," Lance Price, a former media adviser at 10 Downing Street, said to me. "But at every stage of the way he stepped back. And one of the main reasons he pulled back was that Rupert Murdoch was vehemently opposed to closer links with Europe." Price recently published a book, "The Spin Doctor's Diary," in which he writes about Murdoch's influence on the Blair government. "It was never discussed in black-and-white terms," Price told me. "Nobody ever said, 'We have to do this because Murdoch supports it.' But his views were always heard. And they were heard ahead of many Cabinet ministers'."

Downing Street won't say how many meetings Blair has had with Murdoch, but Murdoch has spent more time with him and Gordon Brown than he did with Margaret Thatcher. "She didn't go out of her way to develop a personal relationship with me," Murdoch said. "But Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, whenever I'm in town they say, 'Can't you come over for a cup of tea?' When you're invited by the Prime Minister to have a cup of tea, you have a cup of tea. It's sometimes very inconvenient—if you're only there two days and you have a month's work to do." Murdoch went on, "And you have to be careful to have a cup of tea with them both, or they are very suspicious that you are lining up with the other one."

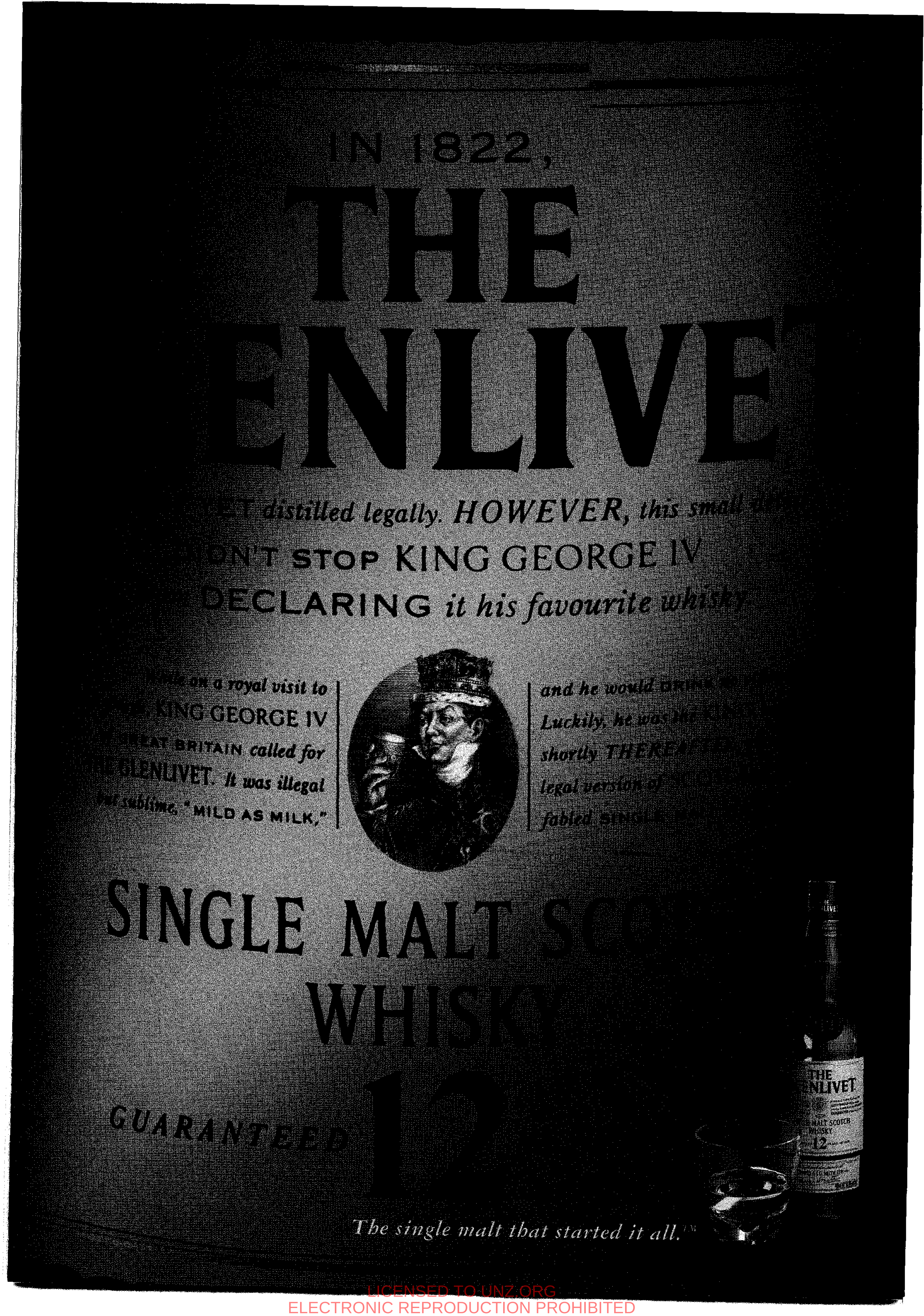
Blair's announcement that he will leave office within a year has generated much speculation about when he will go. Irwin Stelzer told me that Murdoch was eager for Blair to leave, despite their personal friendship, so that the question of his succession could be resolved. "You know Rupert," Stelzer said. "He's a 'get on with it' person. He doesn't like hanging around." Murdoch told me that Blair made a "terrible mistake" when, during last year's election campaign, he promised that he wouldn't serve a full term of office. "To say 'I am going to go in four or five years,' you're a lame duck from that day on. You've seen his authority ebb away, a little bit at a time. The sooner we can see a face-off between Gordon and Cameron, the sooner we can see the future."

Cameron is David Cameron, the youthful leader of the Conservative Party, who is doing well in opinion polls but has yet to impress Murdoch. "Look, he's charming, he's very bright, and he behaves as if he doesn't believe in anything other than trying to construct what he believes will be the right public image," Murdoch said. "He's a P.R. guy. He came out of public relations. He was a lobbyist and P.R. man for Carlton Television"—a British television company—"for seven years, and then went into Parliament five years ago, and that's the only experience of life he's had."

Brown has been Blair's right-hand man for twelve years. Unlike Blair, he is dour, but he shares something important with Murdoch. His father was a minister in the austere Scottish Presbyterian faith, as was Murdoch's paternal grandfather. When Murdoch visits Britain these days, he is shocked by what he sees. "It has become totally hedonistic," he said. "The churches were never much, but what was there has collapsed. You go anywhere in England, when it's not raining, and there's a cluster of people outside every pub, until ten or eleven at night, boozing. The increase in alcohol consumption is pretty alarming."

Murdoch didn't mention the fact that many British people go to pubs to watch soccer matches on Sky, his satellite-television provider. "Gordon has a Calvinistic approach to life, and there is a lot to be said for it," he said. "The question is, is he such a micromanager that he'd want to interfere with everything in the country? And does he still believe that the state can run everything better than private enterprise? He's not an old-style Labour socialist, but how much would he let the private sector get involved in health care and education—that will be the test." Murdoch added that he was "optimistic" about Brown, but, typically, he hedged his bets about which candidate he will support at the next general election, which isn't likely to be held until 2009 or 2010. "It will depend entirely on Gordon's performance—and on the state of Britain," he said.

As for Blair, the *Independent* recently speculated that he would join News Corp.'s board of directors after he leaves Downing Street. Earlier this year, José María Aznar, the former Prime Minister of Spain, who supported the Iraq war, became a non-executive director of News Corp., a post that pays him an annual stipend of a hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars for attending a few board meetings. Blair will need some similarly lucrative work when he leaves office. (Two years ago, he and his wife bought a town house in Connaught



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PERFORMING ARTS UNDER THE BIG TENT David Bates is bringing new life to arts festivals, thanks to an old form of popular entertainment. He's the owner of The Famous Spiegeltent—a handmade mobile pavilion made of wood, canvas, beveled mirrors, and leaded glass that was used in Europe as a prewar dance hall. A true Originator, Bates has taken this bit of Weimar Era nostalgia (Marlene Dietrich once performed from its stage), given it a Post-Modern spin, and used it to present a daily variety show of avant-garde circus, burlesque, and cabaret acts. A player as well as the producer, he also accompanies acclaimed Irish chanteuse Camille O'Sullivan ("Mrs. Henderson Presents," among her film credits) on the piano—most recently at a tent in New York City.

In sharp relief to the usual hushed festival spaces, audience members at The Famous Spiegeltent interact during the performances and can get up from their seats to order drinks from the bar. Amid this relaxed and lively atmosphere, Bates encourages artists to try out new material, which has made the tent a launching site for new careers. An improvisational feel prevails as the evening progresses.

The Famous Spiegeltent has become a mainstay at Scotland's Edinburgh Fringe Festival—and the entire performance space can be assembled or deconstructed in twelve hours, fitted into two forty-foot containers, and shipped to the next spot for Bates and company. Thanks to him, more festivals are also setting up Spiegeltents worldwide, from Adelaide to Montreal. "In this digital, impersonal world, The Famous Spiegeltent brings back a very human, social element," says Bates. There is music, there is drinking, there is laughter, camaraderie, and old-fashioned fun.

At evening's end, the impresario—a member of Edinburgh's by-invitation-only Scotch Malt Whisky Society—likes to unwind surrounded by cast and crew, a glass of single malt in hand, and revel in the magic. We'll drink to that. The Glenlivet, the single malt that started it all, salutes Maestro David Bates, a fellow Originator.

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Square, close to Marble Arch, for nearly seven million dollars.) However, Stelzer thinks that Murdoch is unlikely to invite Blair to join his board. "I don't think Rupert has much regard for his business acumen," Stelzer said. "And he doesn't need political contacts in Britain. Aznar provides information on a whole part of Europe that News Corp. doesn't cover."

In late September, Bill Clinton was back on the front page of the *Post*, following a confrontation with Chris Wallace, the host of "Fox News Sunday." Clinton, asked why he hadn't done more as President to defeat Al Qaeda, turned red, jabbed a finger at Wallace, and accused the Bush Administration of not even trying to pursue Osama bin Laden before September 11th. "I suspect that Bill rehearsed that blowup three times before he did it," Murdoch told me a couple of weeks ago. "I think it helps Hillary with the left, and it bullies others into not asking the same question." If the 2008 election were held today, I asked Murdoch, and the candidates were Hillary Clinton and John McCain, whom would he back? "I'd have to watch it closely," he replied. "McCain—personally, I like him, but we'll just have to see."

On September 22nd, Murdoch appeared on a panel at the Clinton Global Initiative conference, which was held the same week as the United Nations General Assembly. "Gary"—Ginsberg—"roped me into it," Murdoch said before the session, which took place over breakfast in a ballroom at the Sheraton New York, in midtown. It was the sort of do-gooders' event that Murdoch used to avoid. For years, he made few donations to charity, arguing that such money was often wasted.

Clinton began by presiding over a ceremony in which executives from big companies joined him onstage to pledge money to worthy causes and receive applause from the large crowd. The drug company Merck agreed to finance the vaccination of thousands of children in Nicaragua. The insurance giant A.I.G. agreed to finance a scheme to provide loans for poor people in a number of countries. One of the businessmen who walked up to the dais was Ron Burkle, the supermarket magnate who had accused a Page Six reporter of trying to extort him. Murdoch, who was sitting a few feet away, looked down and examined his hands. Clinton then introduced the panel, whose members, in addition to Murdoch, included Colin Powell, the former Secretary of State, and H. Lee Scott, Jr., the chief executive of Wal-Mart. Turning to Murdoch, Clinton said, "It would be remiss of me if I didn't thank Rupert Murdoch and his unusual partner, Barbra Streisand, for funding our effort to control greenhouse gases." Murdoch smiled wanly.

When the session began, Murdoch talked about News Corp.'s efforts to promote social responsibility, such as encouraging its British journalists to teach English to Bangladeshi immigrants, and giving two-thousand-dollar subsidies to employees who buy hybrids. (In fact, the subsidies have been offered only to employees of Sky.) "People want to feel proud of who they are working for," Murdoch said. "They want to feel like good citizens." He couldn't resist poking fun at the self-congratulatory aura of the event, though. Noting that most corporate donations were tax deductible, he said, "We hear a lot about these great gifts, but in most cases the government pays for half of it."

Toward the end of the session, the moderator, Tom Brokaw, asked the panelists if they would encourage their employees to go into public service. Murdoch said that he would, and Brokaw quipped, "I think there are people in this room who would say there are people who work for you who are already working for the Administration." Amid the laughter, Murdoch didn't get a chance to answer. As the crowd filed out, he cornered Brokaw and complained about being denied a riposte. Then he walked behind the stage and slipped out a back way, avoiding a gaggle of journalists. ♦

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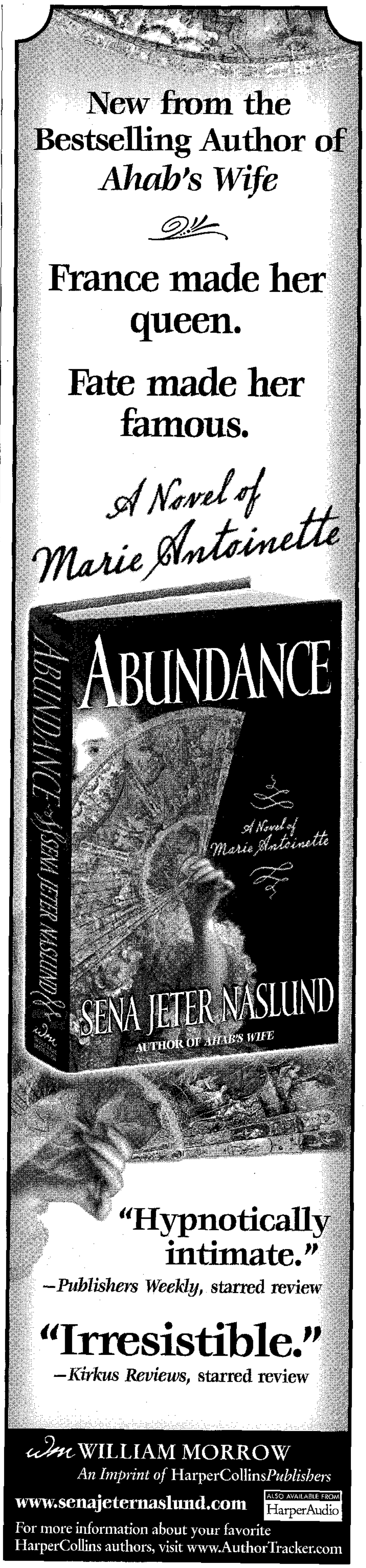
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IT SHOULD HAPPEN TO YOU

The anxieties of YouTube fame.

BY BEN McGRATH

Para Little Loca
SONY

An aspiring Hollywood actress, Stevie Ryan achieved alternate-reality stardom through segments she recorded as Little Loca, a headstron

Stevie Ryan received her first Oscar, after a fashion, this year, at the age of twenty-two, only eighteen months after moving to Los Angeles to become a movie star. She grew up in California's high desert, a couple of hours to the east, in a town along the road to Las Vegas called Victorville. Her parents worked at calibrating truck scales for weigh stations on the interstate—a family business going back two generations on her mom's side. Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Ryan harbored escape fantasies involving the Hollywood of her parents' and grandparents' generations—Lucille Ball, Audrey Hepburn, Buster Keaton, Clara Bow—but she never participated in high-school theatrical productions. She did attend her high-school prom dressed as Marilyn Monroe, down to the elbow-length gloves. (Her date wore a Mohawk and muttonchops.) After a brief stint in community college, she concluded that she was "too right-brain for school," and followed an older brother to Huntington Beach—anything to get out of Victorville. "Then I thought, Screw these people—I'll just go to L.A., see what happens," she said recently.

The Oscar was delivered rather unceremoniously—not in March, at the Academy Awards, but in August, three and a half minutes into a sketch Ryan was filming, while she was still in character as Cynthia, an eighteen-year-old Latina from East L.A. who is better known as Little Loca, after the handle Ryan uses when she uploads some of her homemade sketches onto the video-sharing site YouTube. This was about the fortieth in a series of short Little Loca videos that had by then attracted over a million viewings, thanks to Loca's "big old mouth" (both literally—her heavily outlined lips command attention—and figuratively) and her irreverent putdowns ("You better watch out, *fool*, because God's gonna come around and strike you down with some *lightning* if you don't be *careful*"). Loca was wearing a bandanna and hoop earrings, and sitting on a sofa, against a plain white wall, between two women who were known to regular viewers as Smiley (a friend of Ryan's) and Silent Girl (Ryan's cousin). Rap music was playing in the background.

"*Damn*, this shit is *heavy*," Loca said, in a pronounced Hispanic accent, after accepting the gold statuette from Smiley and waving it around. "I could knock somebody *out* with this." Then she launched into an earnest acceptance speech. "I want to thank YouTube," she said. "You're so important in my life right now. And without YouTube there's no way in *hell* Loca could have, you know, got something like this."

It seemed to be a genuine Oscar—stolen from a bar by a friend of Ryan's—and the moment was rich with post-modern significance. Over the previous three months, Loca's fans, many of them Hispanic, had warmed to her story: spunky ghetto kid—a *chola*—with an overprotective older brother, a 4.0 grade-point average, and her innocence proudly intact. (That gang sign that she seemed to flash at the end of each video was really a sideways V, for virgin.) They knew she'd been prom queen, and they had met her onetime boyfriend Raúl. They'd learned that Silent Girl went mute after the death of her brother, an innocent bystander in a botched robbery. And they'd grown accustomed to Loca's distinctive, almost bewitching screen presence—the way her dark eyebrows and pursed lips slide effortlessly from a knowing smile to an outraged glare. At the same time, they'd begun noticing suspicious details that called into question the diary's authenticity: the mole on Loca's right cheek seemed to vary in size and placement; Raúl bore a striking resemblance to Drake Bell, the co-star of Nickelodeon's "Drake and Josh," a teen sitcom; and didn't Loca resemble a young woman—

a white woman—named Stevie Ryan, who'd been photographed with Drake Bell at the MTV Movie Awards, in June? Accepting the Oscar as Loca was Stevie Ryan's tacit way of acknowledging the act while also congratulating herself on having legitimately achieved a kind of alternate-reality stardom. Smiley and Silent Girl wore black Little Loca T-shirts they'd bought on the Web from a total stranger.

Loca's outing mirrored, in some ways, that of the season's most famous Internet adolescent, LonelyGirl15, whose homespun, if sharply edited, tales of science projects, boy troubles, and religion captivated millions of YouTube viewers before she was exposed as the creation of filmmakers represented by the Creative Artists Agency on Wilshire Boulevard, instead of, say, a girl in her bedroom on some sleepy Midwestern Main Street. But whereas the people behind LonelyGirl15 were interested, from the outset, in exploring the possibilities of a "new art form," as they called it, unfolding in two-minute episodes, Stevie Ryan came by her YouTube celebrity accidentally, while killing time between auditions and acting classes.

Para
Little Loca

atina character. Photographs by Cass Bird.

Ryan's show-business career started when she landed a bit part in a Hilary Duff video (playing Marilyn Monroe) as a result of her first audition, while still living in Victorville. That was all the encouragement she needed, and before long she was dating Bell, whom she met in Huntington Beach. But steady work proved hard to come by, and her reel, after more than a year in L.A., was a typically mixed bag: another music gig (a Billy Idol video), a Japanese commercial, modelling for a fashion startup. She got a job working at a Levi's store in Beverly Hills.

Six months ago, she borrowed Bell's Sony Handycam and started making videos. They were mostly vintage-style silent films, with names like "Beyond the Sea . . ." and "Satin Doll," which she edited, with no formal training, using Windows Movie Maker. She experimented with uploading a few of the films onto YouTube, and only then discovered the site's ruthlessly populist ethos: what people seemed to like was not pretentious art films with obvious Hollywood aspirations but the confessional blogs of young girls in their bedrooms. Little Loca—a composite of the tough-talking, strong-willed *cholas* Ryan used to admire in Victorville—was born.

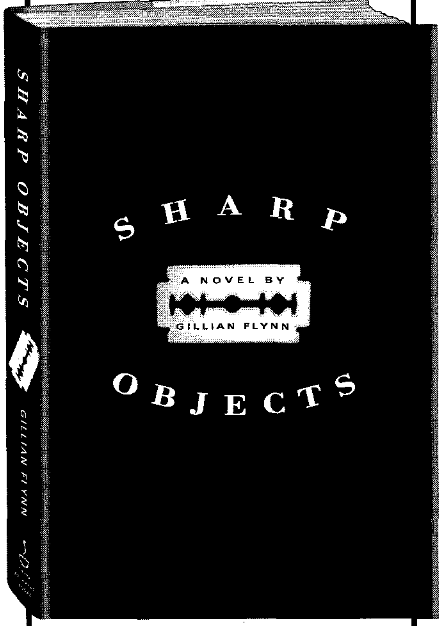
Within a few weeks, YouTube became a full-time pursuit for Ryan. "It's basically all I do," she told me. In addition to Loca, she began doing spoofs and impressions of established YouTube bloggers (a surefire way of getting attention), and kept up, sporadically, with the artsy silent films. The quest for stardom that had led her to Hollywood now pitted her against nonprofessionals in Toronto and Pittsburgh and Tasmania.

Three days after Little Loca's Oscar speech, a seventy-nine-year-old widower named Peter turned on his Webcam, in the English countryside, and announced, "I got addicted to YouTube. It's a fascinating place to go to see all the wonderful videos that you young people have produced, so I thought I'd have a go at doing one myself." (About half of all registered YouTube users are said to be under twenty.) He was wearing a beige V-neck sweater and glasses, and sat in front of nineteen-seventies-era wallpaper and a small painting of a motorcycle. "Oh, yes, and, incidentally, I really am as old as I look," he said. "What I hope I'll be able to do is just bitch and grumble about life in general from the perspective of an old person who's been there and done that."

Peter called himself geriatric1927, after the year of his birth, and uploaded the video, which was two minutes long, under the title "First Try." It had been

STEPHEN KING
loves
SHARP
OBJECTS:

"After the lights were out, the story just stayed there in my head, coiled and hissing, like a snake in a cave."



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viewed scarcely more than three hundred times when it came to the attention of a staffer at YouTube headquarters, in San Mateo, California, who showed it to Maryrose Dunton, YouTube's director of product management. She is one of the people in charge of selecting videos to feature on the YouTube home page, which serves as an informal recommendation list. Of the seventy thousand videos added to the site every day, fewer than a dozen receive this special treatment. Dunton, who says she is "totally fascinated by old people and tech," put Peter's video at the top of the featured list. The YouTube audience, bombarded by frenetic, attention-seeking teens, immediately warmed to Peter's reserve. By the following week, geriatric1927, who had begun narrating his life story, from primary school through the Blitz and on into health-department work in Leicestershire, without ever leaving his chair, had more subscribers than any other user in YouTube's history. "First Try" has now been seen nearly two million times.

One hesitates to cite these statistics, because the story of YouTube, since its launch, ten months ago, has been one of exponential growth, at times challenging the company's abilities to cope with the demand on its servers. (Bandwidth costs are thought to exceed a million dollars a month.) Last week, according to Alexa, a Web-traffic monitor, it was the tenth-biggest site on the Internet, drawing more visits than eBay, Amazon, or Wikipedia. By late summer, there were approximately six million videos archived on the site, and daily viewings had crossed the hundred-million mark, a great many of them devoted not to original content, such as Peter's or Stevie Ryan's, but to preëxisting footage in a wide range of genres: weird home movies (an old woman punching another old woman in the face), sports (Zinedine Zidane's infamous head butt), music (Hendrix playing "The Star-Spangled Banner"), and politics (Senator George Allen referring to a rival's campaign worker as *macaca;* Bill Clinton attacking Fox News on Fox News).

YouTube was founded in February of 2005, in a Silicon Valley garage, by a couple of former PayPal employees, Steve Chen and Chad Hurley. Their background was technological, not visionary. They aimed to provide an easy interface for storing, sorting, and sharing the kinds of digital videos that, thanks to cell-phone cameras and Webcams, have become more and more prevalent. When, in late August, I visited the YouTube offices, which sit above a pizza parlor on the main commercial strip in downtown San Mateo, several of the sixty or so employees had just finished watching clips of a dance number from the previous night's Emmy Awards show, in which the host, Conan O'Brien, sang, "At this very moment your kids are on YouTube watching a cat on a toilet." Julie Supan, YouTube's senior director of marketing, handed me a copy of a recent *People Hollywood Daily.* Its cover read, "Television's Brave New World: How the YouTube Revolution Is Changing Everything You Knew About the Industry." She was unclear about what, specifically, the YouTube revolution is, however. "We don't have time to stop and think a lot," she said.

Hurley, the company's C.E.O., told me that he wanted to "democratize the entertainment process," but YouTube's business model remains somewhat undefined. The found footage that generates the bulk of its traffic is, in many cases, subject to copyright restrictions, leaving YouTube vulnerable to lawsuits. ("The only reason it hasn't been sued yet is because there is nobody with big money to sue," Mark Cuban, the co-founder of HDNet, said recently.) Networks like NBC and Fox have intervened to request that particular clips—"Lazy Sunday," from "Saturday Night Live," or Clinton's Fox appearance—be taken down. (Fox later relented, possibly because of complaints of censorship; NBC has begun uploading promotional spots, if not actual footage.)

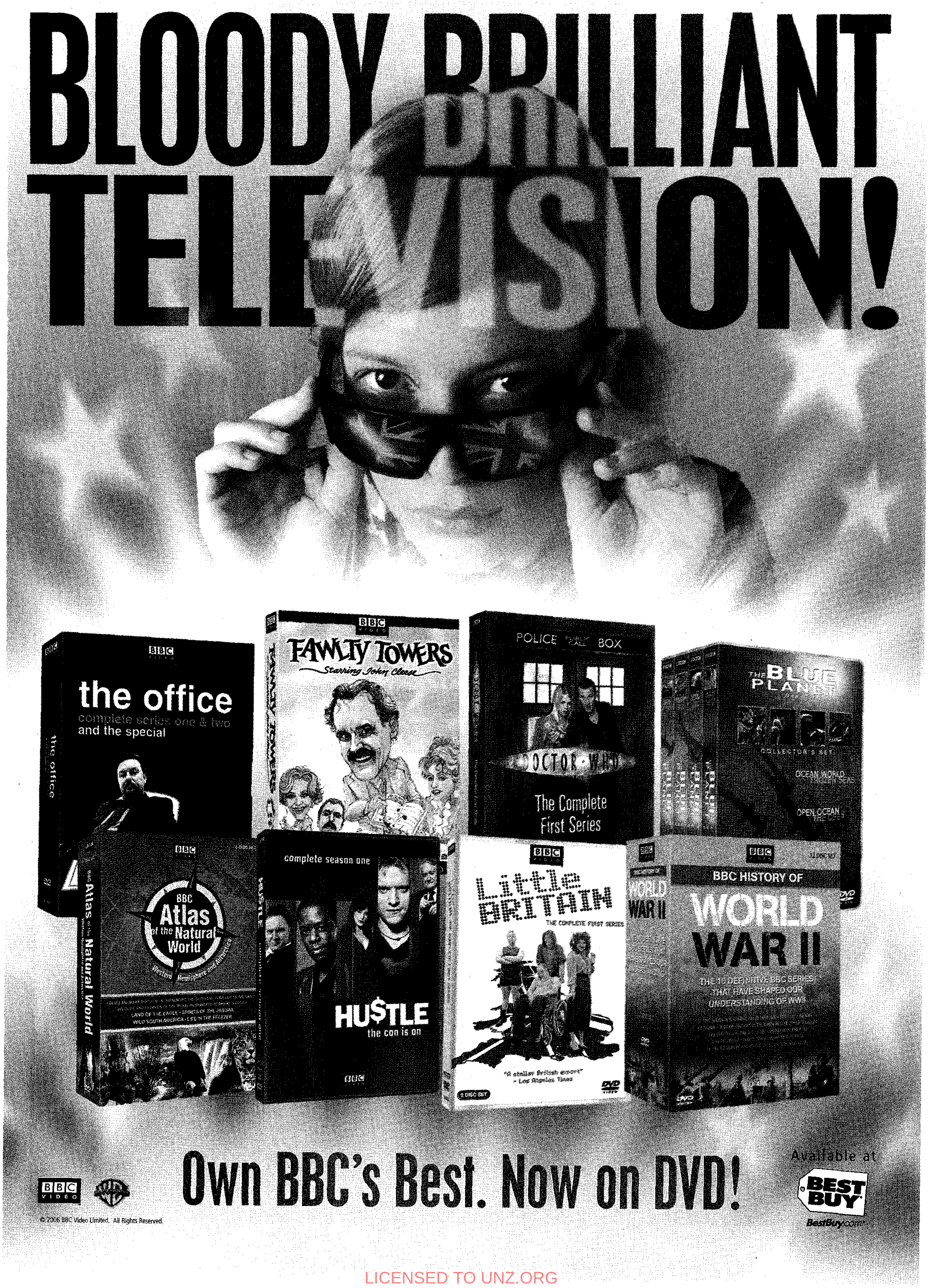
YouTube's long-term strength seems to lie in the devoted community of users and bloggers (or "broadcasters," as the company likes to call them), some of whom turn out to have crossover potential. Brooke Brodack, a skinny, gap-toothed, twenty-year-old receptionist from western Massachusetts, became, in effect, the first real YouTube star, when she was hired in June by Carson Daly to develop content for his production com-

AUTOBIOGRAPHY: NEW YORK

Returning alone after long absence
I was engulfed. No novel, no play
had prepared me for this,
the arched November trees
glazed with ice, the night-emptied
sidewalks chipped with mica
in silent offering.
I had left it all behind
and here—it rose! *The City's*
fiery parcels all undone.

It was the season of regret
and the great wave of first
love lost swept over me.
Catching the buildings'
hooded eyes from afar—
my true paramours!—I was
mournful in my travelling kit,
adolescent with longing
for everything laid out
before me, down on my knees
in the frigid air, on the first
night, asking for benevolence,
second chances without end.

—*Melanie Rehak*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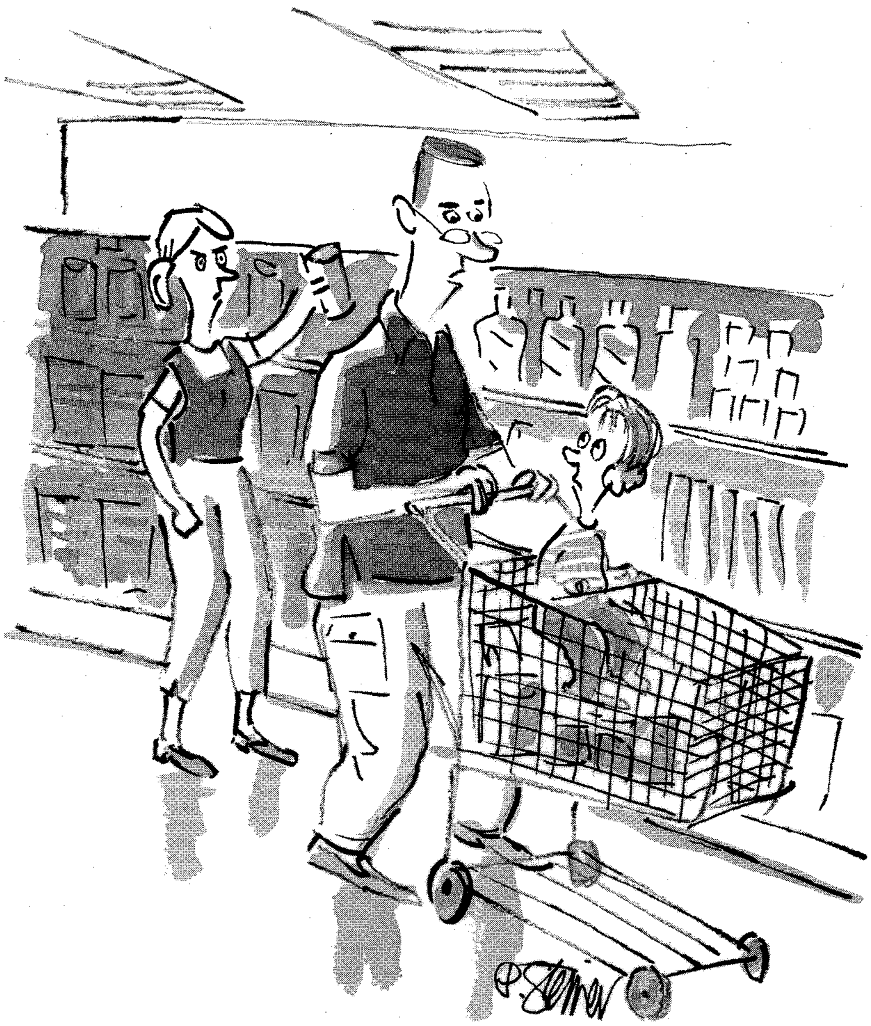
pany on the basis of her defiantly madcap skits and lip-synching.

"They want to be seen, and we're providing the largest audience for that," Hurley said. "But I think the stars on the site don't necessarily translate to television." His plan is to develop a new advertising model that's "not forced on the user." Yet the site's popularity stems from its openness—anyone can upload a video—which makes much of the content difficult to monitor and target ads for. Hurley has therefore begun experimenting with "branded channels," and he pointed to the recently launched Paris Hilton channel as an example. In a joint arrangement with Warner Bros., Hilton's record label, and Fox, which sponsored her channel to promote one of its new shows, her videos—Paris waving at fans in Tokyo, Paris having her hair done—received front-page placement, just like the featured spots. YouTube has also agreed to provide the Warner Music Group with "fingerprinting" technology that will help locate its copyrighted material on the site, which it will be free to authorize or remove as it chooses. Warner will upload its own music-video library, and will share the revenues from advertising targeted at its content.

Perhaps the best case for YouTube as a "democratizer" is Peter the geriatric. "What's interesting to me is he doesn't really have a different story," Maryrose Dunton said. "He wasn't famous. He's just this average old guy, like, telling his story. That's so endearing."

But geriatric1927 was not, in an important sense, a truly democratic star. Like an aspiring model who is spotted in a drugstore by a hot-shot agent, he'd been plucked from the crowd and thrust directly into the spotlight. Ernie Rogers, a twenty-three-year-old guitar player in San Bernardino, may represent the ultimate realization—and corruption—of YouTube's democratic ideal. Although on his user profile he bills himself as a "typical guy," Rogers, who goes by the name lamo1234, has watched more than nine hundred thousand videos on YouTube since May. That averages out to approximately two hundred and fifty per hour, not allowing for sleep. What he watches, primarily, is his own guitar solos (or the first few seconds of them), over and over, to boost his view counts to levels that will make others take notice. His strategy seems to have been successful: one of his solos, a medley of Nirvana, Guns N' Roses, and Beethoven licks, has been viewed two hundred thousand times—and only sixty thousand of those viewings were by him. Unfortunately, this strategy leaves little time for actually playing music. "Next year, the No. 1 spot on YouTube is going to be me, every day," he told me. "I just need to make my band."

Stevie Ryan has a pale, egg-shaped face and dark-red hair that she likes to run her hands through when she's not waving them about—punctuation for the many occasions she finds to use the words "cool" and "awesome." She shares an apartment just off Melrose Avenue with Kendal Sheppard, a young woman she met in an acting class. The apartment, which is just a few blocks from the country's last silent-movie theatre, is decorated with memorabilia honoring Ryan's real-world idols—posters of Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, an "I Love Lucy" pillow—but when I visited, not long ago, she seemed most animated while discussing her Internet rivals, people with names like LisaNova ("Don't mention her in this article, cause I don't want her to get attention") and Vvvvalentine ("Oh, I love this girl—and her videos are about absolutely nothing!") and FilthyWhore ("She's a fucking bitch"). LonelyGirl15 had not yet been outed, but Ryan was already certain that her YouTube blogs were the work of an actress. "Oh, my God, she's the worst deliverer of lines *ever*," Ryan said, cuing up a LonelyGirl episode on her laptop and fast-forwarding to a spot where Bree, as the protagonist is called, claps her hands over her ears and says, without blinking, "My parents are unable to see things from my point of view no matter how much I try and explain it to them." Ryan



"I fight your mother here so I don't have to fight her at home."

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shook her head. "That, to me, is just *so* fake," she said. "I don't understand it."

Ryan's Little Loca videos are also fake, of course, but a number of plot points have been drawn from Ryan's own life. For instance, Kendal Sheppard has a Cairn terrier named Baxter, so, rather than risk having unexplained barking in the background, Ryan wrote Baxter into the script, as a stray that Loca found one day while jogging. In July, back in Victorville, which Ryan calls "the meth capital of the United States," her car was broken into and vandalized. Her first thought was: It's a very Loca situation. So she got into character, put on the accent, and shot an episode inside the car, amid the wreckage. In some cases, the distinction seems to have blurred almost to the point of identity confusion. At one moment in the car-theft video, Ryan/Loca, who is visibly upset, says to the camera, "And this is real, you guys. I'm not trying to play no stupid YouTube joke or nothing. . . . I feel so *invaded*, and I just feel like everybody's *watching* me, you know?"

"Loca is single—or Stevie, whatever people call me," Ryan said to me, explaining that she and Drake Bell had split up earlier in the summer. Bell's disappearance from Ryan's life necessitated a falling out between Loca and Raúl as well. Ryan was clearly having cathartic fun with the exercise, blaming Raúl for the car incident (he needed cash to buy drugs) and, in another episode, mentioning that he'd been beaten up. ("Homegirl was telling me that, you know, they were *hitting* him and *kicking* him up on the floor and stuff like that.")

During a recent trip to San Francisco, Ryan told me, she had been accosted by a group of teens at a mall, wanting to know if she was "Little Loca from YouTube." (She was upset that she'd been caught off guard and hadn't looked her best for all the pictures they snapped.) She also, thanks to Loca, was now being represented by a Hollywood agency. "Seriously, if you Googled me, like, a couple months ago, you wouldn't get crap," she said, typing her name into the search engine. "I'm just a normal person. And now you actually get stuff. It's, like, crazy. That's more than I could ever ask for, just to be on Google." The search led to a fan site for various celebrities; Stevie Ryan's name and head shot were featured alongside Tom Cruise, Rachel McAdams, and Johnny Depp.

Along with the arrival of a Google track record had come some anxieties about her place in the Hollywood pecking order, where, the revolution notwithstanding, YouTube still doesn't count for much. She'd been embarrassed at a recent party when she wondered whether other guests were being patronizing about her Little Loca pursuits. "As weird as it sounds, being in L.A., with all these actors, nobody wants to do it," she said. "There's this whole thing in L.A. where, if it's not on a billboard, it's not really acting." She'd been trying to persuade Sheppard, who once starred in the MTV reality series "Road Rules," another ghettoized genre, to make videos with her, to no avail.

Ryan flipped through her high-school yearbook and volunteered, "You can see I was a lot fatter than I am now." (Her Google search bar had recognized the name Stevie Ryan and suggested two related searches that she had entered previously: "Stevie Ryan thin" and "Stevie Ryan skinny.")

Another anxiety grew out of a suspicion that YouTube was screwing her over, artificially suppressing her page views and going out of its way not to "feature" her the way it had featured geriatric1927. "O.K., seriously? They do not like me on here," she said. "They hate my guts. I've *never* been featured, so I don't watch the featured videos now. I'm really angry at YouTube. I don't care what anybody says, they're doing it on purpose. I have written probably like, I don't know, a million letters."

The transformation from Stevie Ryan to Little Loca takes about fifteen minutes and requires both a minor makeover (drawing the mole, teasing her hair, applying brown lipstick) and a personality adjustment, giving a strident edge to Ryan's blithe Valley Girl persona. ("Cool" and "awesome" become "scandalous" and "nasty.") Stevie wears heels; Loca wears Nike Cortez sneakers, big hoop earrings, and a cross around her neck.

Ryan retrieved a marble composition book in which she'd jotted some notes for her next video, not so much a script as an outline. One item read, "Paris Hilton and her big old nasty feet"—a reminder to talk trash about YouTube's latest interloper. Another said, "Dog shots!" ("I really did take him the other day to get him shots, and I wanted to talk about why that shit really did cost me a hundred and fifty dollars," she said.) There was also a plot-moving device: "Silent Girl is mad because I've been talking to Raúl."

Ryan said that she prefers to shoot Little Loca videos straight through, without editing, to create the genuine feel of a video blog. She tends to ramble, however, and her videos, which once averaged about three minutes, now run for six or seven. ("Loca has too much to say.") Before starting, she read over the viewer-feedback comments posted below her latest video, like a kind of pep talk. "People are so mean on here," she said, after reading one particularly stinging insult, by a fellow-broadcaster named Mojojojoe69. "I give this guy all these shout-outs all the time."

She sat on a bright-red sofa and held the camera in her right hand, just in front of her face. "*Hey*, everybody, what up? It's your *homegirl*, Loca, all up in the *house*," she started, before tearing into her critics. "All I see is you fools over here, crying like a bunch of damn *babies*, including *you*, Mojojojoe69. What the *hell* is *your* problem? . . . Either you better *respect* or you better get the *hell* out of here, fool. Make your *damn* mind up, all right? You can't talk shit to Loca one second and be her *homey*." After a minute or so, Ryan stopped, concluding that she was talking too fast. Take two ran for four minutes before she stopped again. ("I don't remember if I talked about Mojojojoe.") The third try, despite faltering arm strength, stuck: six minutes and thirty-three seconds. She downloaded it onto her laptop, and then, opening Windows Movie Maker, selected "grayscale," converting it to a highly saturated (for YouTube) black-and-white. Next, she searched her music library for an old-school rap track ("Loca's really gangsta," she said), ultimately selecting "Protect Ya Neck," by the Wu-Tang Clan, which she set to play on a separate track underneath her voice. A series of selections—"fade," "in and out," "moving titles," "layered"—created a template for the opening credits. She selected a graffiti font and gave the video a title: "The Locamotion Isn't Happy with You Guys."

"I seriously can't sit through my videos," she said, after uploading it onto the site. "They're, like, so annoying." She combed out her hair, removed her makeup, and then got in her car and drove to the actor Crispin Glover's house, in Silver Lake, to discuss plans for possible joint projects: a YouTube star landing a feature-film role, and a Hollywood star joining the YouTube community.

Crispin Glover was wearing a black jacket, black pants, black shoes, and black socks. His front door was open, and in the yard were a number of antique cars covered with tarps. Reverberation from an indie-rock performance, part of a street festival on Sunset Boulevard, made its way up the hill. Ryan curled up in a chair in the living room and looked adoringly at Glover.

A few weeks earlier, Glover had sent her a fan letter through MySpace (its subject was "Genuine Crispin Glover writes

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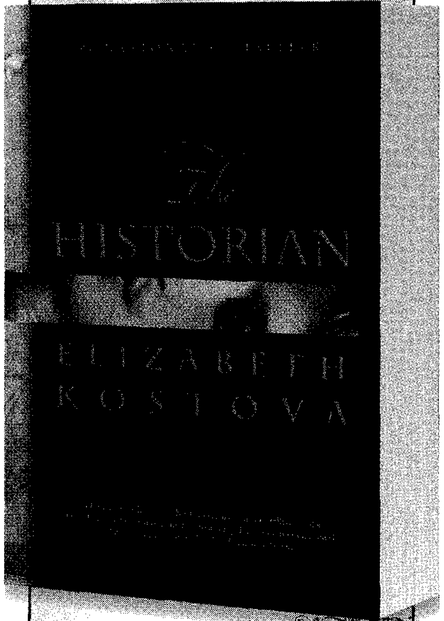

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Stevie Ryan”). It said that he was planning to make a “party film,” set at a castle he owned in the Czech Republic, and he was looking for talented (and inexpensive) actors to work with.

“I saw that she was doing these things that fooled people, and that she had these various characters,” Glover said, explaining his initial attraction to her YouTube work. “And I’ve had some experience with that as well—things that I’ve done people will think different things about what they actually are. I like that.”

A search for Glover’s name on YouTube will uncover, among other perplexing things, at least ten different uploads of a 1987 appearance on David Letterman’s show. Glover comes onstage wearing a wig, funny glasses, tight striped pants, and platform shoes. He behaves very strangely (one of the YouTube clips was uploaded with the title “Drugs Are Baaaad”); Letterman is not amused. Glover challenges Letterman to an arm-wrestling contest, and then karate-kicks in the direction of Letterman’s head. Letterman rises from his desk and walks offstage. YouTube users have watched the incident more than a quarter million times. “It’s interesting now that there’s this whole new life for it,” Glover said.

Glover spent much of the past decade writing, directing, and producing a film called “What Is It?,” using mostly actors with Down syndrome, which he plans to personally present at art theatres in selected cities this fall. (He himself plays a character called Dueling Demi-God Auteur.) He didn’t seem to have much interest in exploring YouTube’s potential as a new narrative format, to compete with television and feature films, and instead saw it as a forum for discovering new talent and for promoting preëxisting projects, like “What Is It?” In fact, as he talked, the two major issues facing YouTube—copyright and advertising—were brought into relief. While he didn’t mind the clips that had been posted from studio films he’d acted in (Glover played George McFly, Michael J. Fox’s father, in “Back to the Future”), he was concerned about the prospect of someone posting a bootleg of his own movie. “That’s something I would be very litigious about,” he said.

Turning to me, he asked, “What’s the right word for the conspiracy theories that Stevie has about viewership counts? Did she talk to you about that?”

“He’s, like, ‘Yeah, *right*,’ ” Ryan said.

“Who, me?” Glover asked. “No, no. I understand how those things happen, and it *does* have to do with corporate sensibilities. I don’t know what’s happening in her case—”

“Well, what do you *think* is happening?” Ryan interrupted.

“Well, if there would be things like that going on, the reason it would be happening is because they need to be figuring out how their sponsorship elements are going to be working, and corporate elements always get concerned about making audiences uncomfortable,” Glover said. He brought up the fact that she plays a Hispanic character. “Racism is a hot issue, and if there’s anything where people can be concerned about race issues, that’s a sponsorship issue,” he said. “In the seventies, there was that Frito-Lay character—he sang a song, ‘Ay, yii, yii, yiii, I am the Frito Bandito.’ And at a certain point they had to get rid of that character, because he was thought to be making fun of the Hispanic community.”

Glover was on a roll now, the wise forty-two-year-old actor-director schooling the naïve twenty-two-year-old on the ways of the world, and warning her against the inevitable corruption of her utopian Internet democracy. “*My* movie definitely goes into those areas that corporate entities would be concerned about,” he said. (Glover describes “What Is It?” as “the adventures of a young man whose principal interests are snails, salt, a pipe, and how to get home.”) “And you have to start questioning the basis of the culture itself, being a free-market democracy, which has to do with capitalism—and there are *questions* about capitalism.” Ryan’s eyes began to glaze over. “You know, you can question Communism, you can question capitalism, you can question fascism,” Glover went on. “They all have their innate evils, so to speak. And it’s the corporate entity that ends up getting power within a capitalistic culture.”

Ryan picked up on the doomsday narrative, if not the political theory. “Four months ago, when I was first on YouTube, it was *not* where it’s at right now,” she said. “I think Little Loca was, like, No. 5 most-subscribed, and now, like, I’m No. 15—because why? There’s all these other people they’re featuring on there. And it’s, like, bullshit.”

A few weeks later, Ryan posted a new Little Loca installment. It begins with Loca walking down the street (“My dad let me take out the camera,” she explains) and stumbling upon a vintage Bentley. “*Damn*, there’s a bad-ass car up right here,” she says. A man with long hair, funny glasses, platform shoes, and striped pants—Glover’s Letterman outfit—approaches. “This fool be lookin’ *scandalous* as *hell*,” Loca says. “Don’t tell me that’s *his* car. . . . Hey, wait a minute. You look like McFly, fool. Hey, are you Crispin Glover?”

“No,” the man says, acting nervous.

“You’re in a disguise,” she says.

“No, I’m not,” he says, now indignant. “People think that, and it’s not true.”

He drives off, but soon the scene cuts to Glover’s front yard, where the tarps have been removed from the cars. “Look at these cars and this house,” Loca says. “And you’re going to try to say that you ain’t Crispin Glover the *movie star*?”

“Movie star?” he asks. “*That* guy? That guy’s an *idiot*.”

At about the four-minute mark, the screen fades to a “To be continued . . .” Then there is a printed advertisement: “See Crispin Hellion Glover in a live dramatic performance along with his feature film ‘What Is It?’ ” The film’s trailer follows.

Less than forty-eight hours after Ryan uploaded the video she shot in front of me at her apartment, it was removed from the site, further fuelling Ryan’s suspicions. “They removed my video because YouTube always removes my videos,” she wrote me in an e-mail. “It’s O.K., I still love them.”

The real reason for her video’s removal had nothing to do with any personal antipathy toward her among the YouTube staffers. YouTube had received a Digital Millennium Copyright Act complaint from a third party. Apparently, Ryan’s mistake had been to edit her sketch too ambitiously, post-dubbing the Wu-Tang Clan soundtrack that was distinct from the video recording, and therefore digitally traceable. Had she merely played the song on her stereo while shooting the scene on the sofa, there would have been no way for anyone to detect it, short of watching every video on the site.

In September, Ryan found herself featured at last on the YouTube home page. But the video that YouTube had selected was one of the derivative silent films, a sentimental Chaplin tribute set to the piano music of Yann Tiersen. In just two weeks, it was viewed nearly three hundred thousand times—far more than any of the Loca videos. The response, judging from the seventeen hundred comments, was largely positive, although one viewer named Draftgon wrote, “Can anyone tell me why THIS video got on the front page? I don’t see anything interesting about it.” A girl named Morbidangel wrote, “WOW! Beautiful. . . . You made me cry.”

That comment drew a reply from Ryan herself: “Awww, please don’t cry. Art is beautiful, it reminds you that you’re really not alone.” ♦

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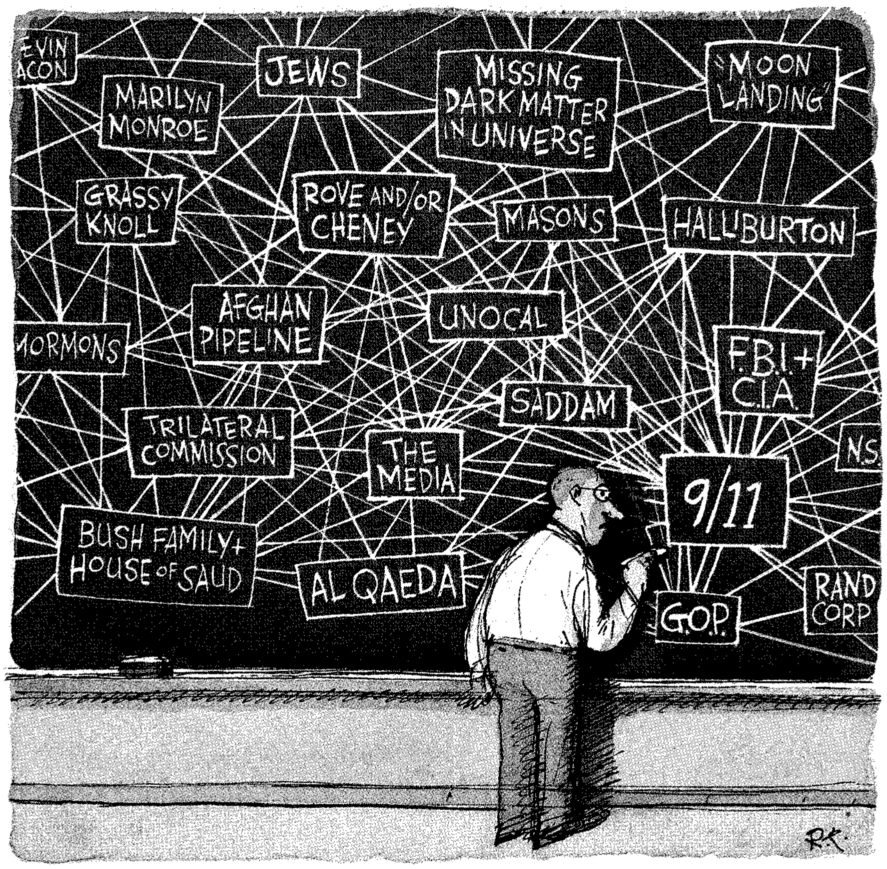
PARANOID STYLE

How conspiracy theories become news.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

"On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country," President Bush declared nine days after the 2001 attacks, during an address to a joint session of Congress which may turn out to be the high-water mark of his Presidency. Not only was September 11th the first major attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor; it was a blow struck to the heart of the country's major centers of finance and government, with total surprise, by a shadowy opponent not susceptible to direct counterattack. It is hard to think of any event in our national life at once so devastating and so puzzling since the assassination of President Kennedy.



Since September 11th, commentators have inferred many hidden agendas and alliances.

Bush quickly, and evidently correctly, identified Al Qaeda as the party responsible for the attacks on the United States, but he chose to present the nation with a different, more mysterious enemy: a broad category of terrorists, people scattered all over the world who "hate our freedoms" and want to "disrupt and end a way of life." These were resonant and inspiring phrases, and they framed the national situation, plausibly enough for people not to notice that it was being framed, as one in which untold numbers of unseen enemies were engaged in an ongoing and highly effective conspiracy to do us terrible harm.

That already seems like a long time ago. Since then, the United States has not had another major terrorist attack, but the road from September 11th led first to Afghanistan and then to Iraq. The logic of the connection between September 11th and the American conquest and occupation of Iraq has been obliterated, and a series of other justifications for the war, starting with Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, have also dematerialized. The conspiracy against America that Bush announced five years ago forms a kind of matched set with the conviction, widely held at least by those who don't like Bush and his policies, that the Administration conspired to use the September 11th attacks to launch an unrelated and unnecessary military adventure, whose prosecution has entailed so many dark doings—secret imprisonment, torture—that the war in Iraq looks like a tactical plot contained within a strategic plot.

In "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," published forty years ago in the wake of Barry Goldwater's crushing defeat by Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 Presidential election, Richard Hofstadter, the mid-century historian who was one of the country's leading intellectuals, identified politics that focusses on a "hostile and conspiratorial world" that is "directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life" as being at that moment mainly a phenomenon of the right, which felt that its country had been taken away forever. Now Goldwater no longer looks like a vestigial political figure, the right is in power in Washington, and the paranoid style dwells as much, or more, on the left. Hofstadter also saw the sort of American mind that is drawn to the idea of powerful hidden forces as being inclined to locate them somewhere outside politics. Today, much of the proliferating conversation about malign forces portrays them as operating from the top down, rather than from the outside in: the United States government isn't their target; it's their home.

Journalism, which seeks to explain the world to people, is a perfect vehicle for theories about conspiracies by the powerful, and this year has brought an efflorescence of them. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., in *Rolling Stone*, recently wrote, "After carefully examining the evidence, I've become convinced that the president's party mounted a massive, coordinated campaign to subvert the will of the peo-

RICHARD THOMPSON

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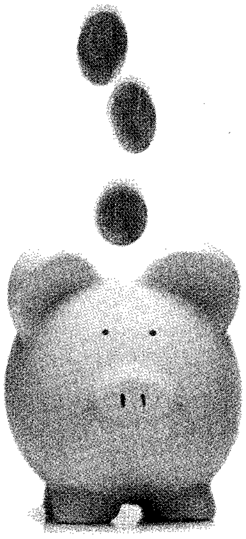

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ple in 2004," and that John Kerry would have won if the voting had been conducted fairly. Kennedy devoted most of his article to Ohio, where, for example, he says that, before the election, one Republican county government "invented a nonexistent terrorist threat" in order to prevent press scrutiny of the vote count. Celia Farber, writing last spring in *Harper's* about an AIDS drug that she says was dangerous and should not have been put on the market, abruptly switched gears and offered this generalization about the state of drug research in America: "Today's scientists are almost wholly dependent upon the goodwill of government researchers and powerful peer-review boards, who control a financial network binding together the National Institutes of Health, academia, and the biotech and pharmaceutical industries. Many scientists live in fear of losing their funding. 'Nobody is safe,' one N.I.H.-funded researcher told me."

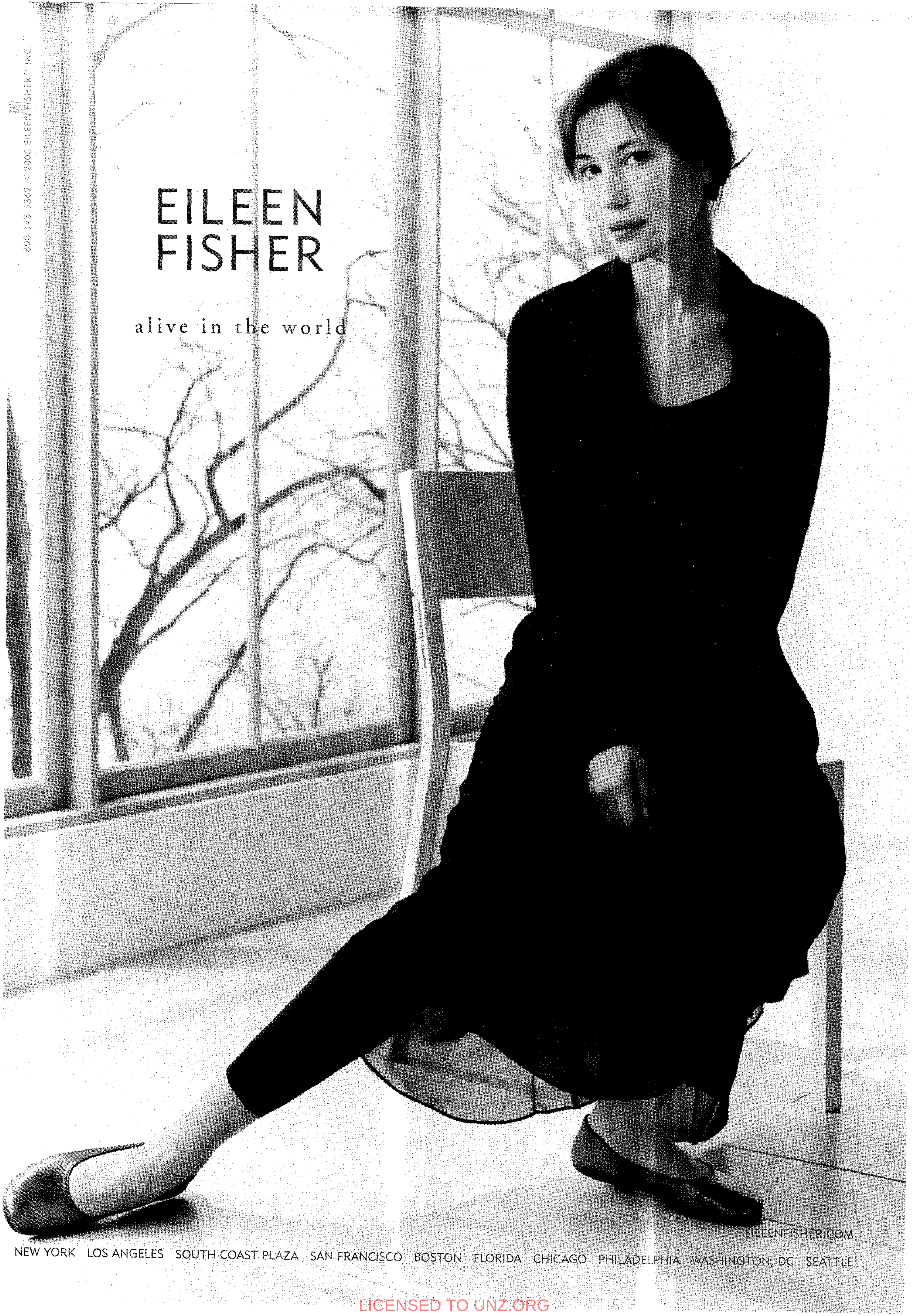
There is a complex ecosystem of discussion of the hidden forces now at play in world affairs. Much of it originates outside the confines of conventional journalism but makes itself known inside, often via denials and refutations that can't help but purvey the underlying theory. "The Path to 9/11," ABC's recent miniseries about the events leading up to September 11th, in which several Clinton Administration officials were shown purposely ignoring the threat of Al Qaeda (something that the real-life members of the Clinton Administration, including Clinton himself, have loudly insisted that they didn't do), was officially a work of fiction. But it was about a horrifying thing that really happened, and its allegations-in-effect were discussed in lots of news outlets. Just about every paranoid theory turns up somewhere—in a pamphlet or a self-published book or a review, or on a Web site or a talk show. Theories become news, and then get covered as news. So even people who neurotically limited their intake to organs of the journalistic establishment (if such people exist) would have to know that somewhere out there are notions of disturbing causal links that the news organizations they trust don't endorse. The superego is always aware of what the id is up to.

A good example is "Loose Change," a Web-resident, regularly updated documentary produced by three young guys from upstate New York (the auteur and narrator is Dylan Avery, who is twenty-three), which draws occasional rebuttals in the mainstream media. When I logged on to watch it, a ticker informed me that I had joined an audience that numbers in the millions, and its opening frames conveyed the thrill of the revelation of concealed truths. Synthesizer music freighted with meaning played in the background while a decades-old declassified government document appeared on the screen, revealing the birth of a strategy to stage terrorist attacks in order to create a pretext for military adventures.

The main thesis of "Loose Change" is that the September 11th attacks were staged. Commercial flights did not hit the World Trade Center and the Pentagon—*something* did, but not jets filled with passengers. United Flight 93 did not crash-land in Pennsylvania; it was diverted to Cleveland and its passengers taken to an empty NASA research facility. There were no Islamist suicide hijackers. The World Trade Center towers collapsed as a result not of the impact of whatever it was that hit them but of the detonations of explosives that had been secreted there. It isn't made completely clear who was responsible, but "Loose Change" hints that the perpetrators were an alliance of Wall Street speculators, who wanted to panic the markets while getting their hands on a large supply of gold that they knew to be hidden nearby, and Bush Administration officials who wanted to go to war in Iraq. As we learn all this, we see the towers collapse, over and over, along with footage—which "Loose Change" unashamedly announces it has appropriated from news organizations, copyright be damned—of the horror and pathos in the streets nearby. These are images with a powerful undertow; we could watch them forever, and we aren't ordinarily given the opportunity. They give "Loose Change" some of its undeniably mesmerizing quality, along with the procession of tantalizing revelations, many accompanied by samizdat video footage of plane crashes, military exercises, and the like: that the debris found near the September 11th sites does not match debris from the purported planes; that Larry A. Silverstein bought the Twin Towers and took out a large insurance policy that specifically mentioned terrorist attacks, only days before September 11th; that the two American Airlines flights that crashed that morning had not been scheduled to fly.

To engage in huffy denunciations of the journalistic shortcomings of "Loose Change" would probably not change the minds of many of its fans. September 11th—or, to be more precise, the year and a half bookended by September 11th and the beginning of the war on Iraq—is very high on the list of all-time great subjects for conspiratorial speculation in American history. It is almost impossible for the diminished modern mind to connect with what was probably the No. 1 subject of nineteenth-century political-conspiracy thinking: the alleged plot by bankers to stop making paper currency redeemable in silver. In the twentieth century, the greatest generator of conspiracy theories was Communism (which became much less mysterious with the opening of the Soviet archives). The events of George W. Bush's first Presidential term—which began in a blizzard of charge and countercharge about the election results—are far more accessible, and not just because of being contemporary. They offer an almost perfect blend of inexplicable disasters of mysterious origin and a seeming infinitude of consequential, unresolved detail. (We still don't know, for example, who was responsible for the anthrax attacks that came on the heels of September 11th.)

By now, many books deal with this material. At one end of the spectrum are self-published works like "The Puzzle of 9-11," by Eric D. Williams, which substantively has much in common with "Loose Change" but is far less polished. Then there are books brought out by mainstream publishers but aimed at an audience of committed believers and Bush-haters, and therefore written in a spirit more of exhortation than of persuasion. A French best-seller in 2002 was "The Horrifying Fraud," by Thierry Meyssan. In the United States, there is "Armed Madhouse" (Dutton, 2006), by Greg Palast, a private investigator turned journalist whose periodical work appears (not by accident, he says) in Britain, in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"Mind if I change melons?"

such respectable venues as the BBC and the *Guardian*, but not in the United States; he has been published here in *Harper's* and *The Nation*.

"Conspiracy theorists believe George Bush, long before the invasion of Iraq, had a plan to control its oil," Palast writes in his introduction. "That's wrong. He had *two* plans and my investigative team obtained both." One of these, "Plan A," was produced by a State Department team at a "confidential gathering" at the home of an Iraqi exile named Falah Aljibury, in Walnut Creek, California, in February, 2001, and involved a military coup against Saddam Hussein. The other, the hundred-and-one-page "Plan B," titled "Moving the Iraqi Economy from Recovery to Sustainable Growth"—essentially a blueprint for privatizing the Iraqi economy and turning it over to American corporations that were Republican political contributors—was produced, Palast asserts, by neoconservatives in November, 2001.

"Armed Madhouse" is great fun. It's written with brio and with sarcastic, knowing humor, and it has a breezy narrative drive that comes from Palast's showing himself finding, detective style, a succession of obscure policy analysts who provide him with pieces of the secret puzzle. I wouldn't know from reading it exactly where one could get hold of a copy of Plan A and Plan B; generally, Palast gives us a mixture of named and unnamed sources, treats public institutions (like the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, at Rice University) as covert agencies, and does not operate at a courtroom evidentiary standard. Skeptics who need to be won over do not seem to be the intended audience.

There is by now a substantial shelf of well-documented books covering some of the same subject matter, starting with the official report of the 9/11 Commission. Sometimes these are quoted in the less mainstream material, and sometimes they are treated contemptuously, as examples of the press's coziness with the Administration. Books, though, are somehow not the ideal medium for speculating about the real story of the Bush Administration. We've been too deeply conditioned by years of reading books with bibliographies and footnotes to be entirely persuadable by those which don't have them; and prose itself, when deployed at length by people less gifted than James Joyce, is a somewhat plodding medium, demanding the use of conventional logical and temporal sequencing. The most powerful and memorable material about what misdeeds the Bush Administration may be secretly up to appears in documentary films.

Documentaries have the authority that accompanies images of things that really happened, the ability to make associative leaps through cuts and interpositions of unrelated material, and an implied freedom from having to produce a response to whatever charges an interview subject makes on camera. Michael Moore's "Fahrenheit 9/11" (2004) was the groundbreaking left-wing documentary about the September 11th–Iraq war connection. (Those with good memories will recall that Moore wondered, in a voice-over, whether even the war in Afghanistan was "really about something else": UNOCAL's long-standing interest in building a gas pipeline there.) Three other recent films offer a chance to look closely at this particular marriage of medium and subject: "Highjacking Catastrophe," by Sut Jhally and Jeremy Earp, of the Media Education Foundation; "Uncovered: The Whole Truth About the Iraq War," by Robert Greenwald; and "Why We Fight," by Eugene Jarecki.

The Media Education Foundation, established in 1991 by Jhally, who is a professor of communications at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and Greenwald's Brave New Films, in Los Angeles, are prolific nonprofit ateliers that operate in the rapidly expanding space for political activism that takes the form of journalism. Their work does not appear primarily in theatres, but it is widely available for sale; both companies are active presences on the Web and both encourage friends to hold at-home screenings of their films, which are meant to inspire direct political involvement. "Why We Fight" is much more a product of the high-art documentary-film world. It had a theatrical release from the small-picture division of a major studio, Sony Pictures Classics, and it won a Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival last year. There is a good deal of overlap, and not just in subject matter: Karen Kwiatkowski, a former Pentagon official who has left government and become a public critic of the Administration, appears in all three. Chalmers Johnson, the author, Japan hand, and ex-C.I.A. consultant, appears in two of the three, and so does Dick Cheney, making his memorable assertion, at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention in the summer of 2002, that "there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has

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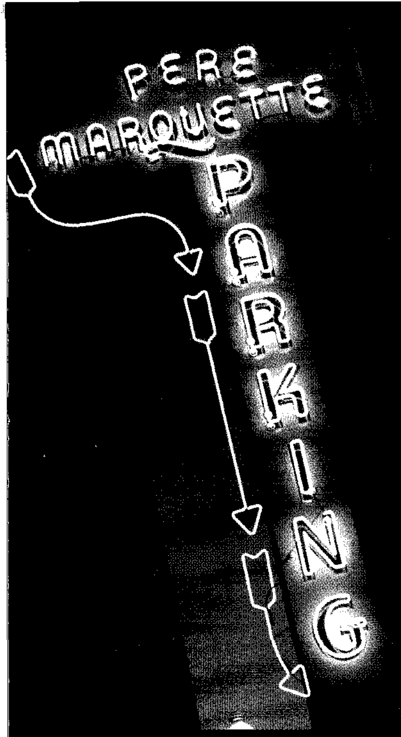

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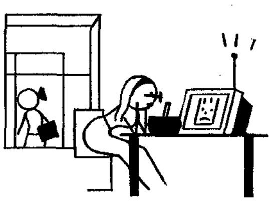
weapons of mass destruction." Two have material on Cheney's pre-Administration employer, Halliburton, and two discuss the Project for the New American Century, the neoconservative foreign-policy organization chaired by William Kristol, of the *Weekly Standard,* which produced a famous report in September, 2000, called "Rebuilding America's Defenses." The report notes that "revolutionary change" in American foreign policy will not be possible unless there is "some catastrophic and catalyzing event—like a new Pearl Harbor." It was endorsed by several people who soon became high officials of the Bush Administration, and its recommendations foreshadowed the Administration's foreign policy.

The three films have quite different levels of intellectual ambition and, evidently, of financing. "Uncovered," unlike Greenwald's better-known subsequent film, "Outfoxed," a sendup of Fox News that merrily employed a lot of laboriously gathered and deftly edited film clips, is mainly made up of interviews; these were filmed using plain-vanilla production values, with prominent critics of the Iraq war—most of them long-serving military, intelligence, and diplomatic officials whose opposition fairly represents the general opposition of the professional communities they come from. Interspersed with the interviews are clips of statements by the Administration's top officials—most often Bush himself, secondarily Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, and Condoleezza Rice—and a few stock shots of the fighting in Iraq. The music and graphics are cheesy and amateurish. And yet "Uncovered" works just fine. Although it makes no attempt to appear balanced, or to seek out opposing voices (the only current official to sit for an interview is Henry Waxman, the liberal congressman from Los Angeles), the interviewees have a point, and the material from the Administration is just embarrassing. To see the Bush people say things over and over, with total certainty, that have turned out not to be true—about Saddam Hussein's nuclear capacity and his ties to Al Qaeda, about the cost of the war, about how well it has gone—has a power that can't be denied. Greenwald sticks with the record, and gets plenty enough to serve his purposes without having to stray into the realm of supposition.

"Highjacking Catastrophe" begins with a block of text quoting Hermann Göring, with the obvious implication that the Administration is using some of the techniques that the Nazis did, and from there it moves back and forth between reporting and rhetorical overkill. It is executed at a high level of polish. The interviews look professional, and the voice-over narration is by Julian Bond, who sounds like authority itself. Compared with "Uncovered," "Hijacking Catastrophe" puts on the screen a much lower proportion of people involved in foreign policy, and a much higher proportion of intellectuals and activists of the left: we hear from Noam Chomsky, Norman Mailer, Daniel Ellsberg, and Michael Eric Dyson. Therefore, there is more assertion and less evidence. At one point, Vandana Shiva, a physicist and environmental activist who comes across as direct, sincere, and trustworthy, declares that the war in Iraq was "very clearly about oil," and that statement is treated as if that's all the proof we need. The theory of the pipeline in Afghanistan reappears. And there is more emphasis in "Highjacking Catastrophe" than in "Uncovered" on the complicity of the press in plumping for the war in Iraq (indeed, you get the impression that the big national news organizations did nothing but cheerlead).

There are two not completely congruent theories of the war in "Highjacking Catastrophe." One is that neoconservatives, who had been thinking for years about enshrining the United States as the world's lone superpower, and who had always felt that a disastrous attack could be used to mobilize the public, seized upon September 11th as the way to achieve the invasion of Iraq that they longed for. The other is that big corporations—especially oil companies—wanted war, and used their friends in government to get it. (The reason the two theories aren't congruent is that one rarely encounters oilmen in neoconservative circles, and vice versa—it's hard to picture the Project for a New American Century crowd booking a private room at the Petroleum Club in Houston to make war plans.) This imprecision is partly a function of an impulse to throw in everything but the kitchen sink, if it is unfavorable to the Administration. We see, over the course of an hour, George W. Bush wielding an axe on Earth Day; a flash from the Willie Horton ad from the 1988 Presidential campaign, which reminded voters that Michael Dukakis had furloughed a brutal killer; another Nazi analogy (this one featuring Joseph Goebbels), and a series of chastisements of the Administration for having increased the national debt to pay for the war. Because it is such a compressed and emotional medium, documentary film is friendly to inferential stretches. We see the pipeline on a map of Afghanistan, then Cheney's official portrait as the head of Halliburton, then pro-war magazine covers, then the "shock and awe" bombing of Baghdad, connected by explanatory clips from interviews. *Quod erat demonstrandum.* As Hofstadter put it, "The curious leap in imagination . . . is always made at some critical point in the recital of events."



Eugene Jarecki was able to persuade several important early advocates of the Iraq war to sit for interviews in "Why We Fight." We see John McCain, William Kristol, and Richard Perle, and they are just as beautifully lit and carefully framed as the more sympathetic witnesses, though it's clear we're not meant to make up our own minds whom to believe between them and, say, Chalmers Johnson. McCain's last appearance, for example, has him, with an embarrassed chuckle, interrupting an interview to take a call from Cheney. But "Why We Fight" aims for a largeness of historical sweep and a feeling of nonpartisanship. It begins and ends with excerpts from President Eisenhower's farewell address, in which he coined the term "military-industrial complex" by way of warning against the possibility that defense contractors might exert an excessive influence on foreign and defense policy. Eisenhower's son John and granddaughter Susan appear to elaborate on the President's concerns.

"Why We Fight" is an accomplished piece of filmmaking, with a haunting musical score and a good deal of fresh footage shot on location, but logically it doesn't scan. Its main argument is that Ike's dreaded military-industrial complex runs American foreign policy, and will always use its power to push the government into war, with tinnily patriotic and idealistic propaganda as the tool for gulling the public. "This is a ritual that we have been seeing for decades," Charles Lewis, the founder of the Center for Public Integrity, says. "It's basically economic colonialism." And a little later he says, "Most of the government's decisions today are substantially dictated by powerful corporate interests." To underscore this point, Jarecki sends his film crew out to air shows and other displays of the latest weaponry. Slick salespeople for defense contractors peddle their shiny wares from booths in convention centers. Awed Americans watch military jets streak past.

This idea entails a tendentious reading of Eisenhower himself, who hardly woke up at the end of his term and regretted his support of his own Administration's interventions around the world—Guatemala, Iran—which "Why We Fight" rolls across the screen as part of a seemingly endless litany. But, more important, it doesn't fit comfortably with a secondary theme that "Why We Fight" can't resist introducing, which is that the Bush Administration, under the influence of the neoconservatives, has departed, in a more hawkish direction, from the main current of American foreign policy. Richard Perle says that the world has changed and that the United States must take a radical new approach. William Kristol is shown entering the offices of the Project for the New American Century, and the title page of "Rebuilding America's Defenses" appears on the screen. One of "Why We Fight" 's story lines (Administrations coming and going and the military-industrial complex successfully pressing ever onward) contradicts another story line: neoconservatives using September 11th to accomplish something that Eisenhower would surely have resisted.

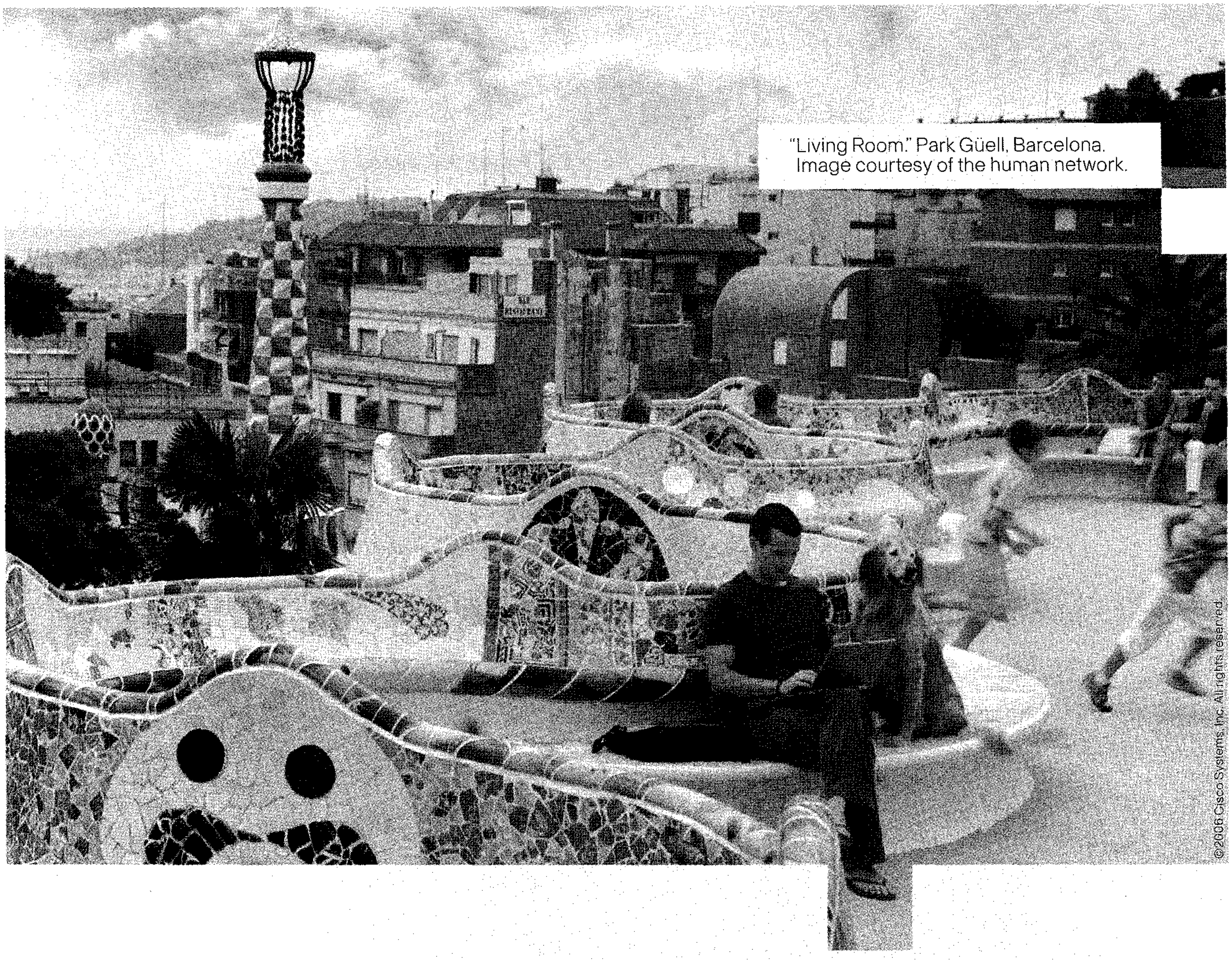
The shock of September 11th, along with the enormity of the evident failure of the American invasion of Iraq, is simply incommensurate with what we are conditioned to expect as we watch the unspooling of American history. It feels as if a new factor had to be added—as if some additional, unofficial force must have been at work. Otherwise, no explanation of what happened could possibly make sense. And the facts presented in these films, and the mountain of related material on the same subject, aren't invented. Much of it bristles with maps, charts, and expert testimony; as Richard Hofstadter observed, the appurtenances of scholarship—documents, footnotes—are a hallmark of the paranoid style.

SMITH
WOULDN'T STOP PICKING AT IT.
Kanin

The Project for the New American Century did publicly long for the removal of Saddam Hussein for years before President Bush took office. Donald Rumsfeld did scribble notes on a pad on the afternoon of September 11th about how the consequence could be an attack on Iraq. Halliburton did get more than ten billion dollars in government contracts, for construction projects and logistical support in Iraq, under unusually streamlined bidding procedures.

Almost all this material, though, treats correlation as causation, and jumps across open evidentiary spaces to make things that aren't demonstrably connected look as if they were. Larry Silverstein's insuring the World Trade Center shortly before September 11th doesn't necessarily mean that he was forewarned about September 11th; Halliburton's contract-winning success wasn't necessarily dictated by Cheney, nor was its prospect necessarily a motivation for war. We never get to see the moment when President Bush hears and signs on to the views of the Project for the New American Century. We don't see the White House learn, before the war, that Saddam Hussein has no weapons of mass destruction but decide to say that he does anyway. We aren't in the room where the big defense contractors give the determining push for the war in Iraq. We don't see the editors of *Time* and *Newsweek* decide to back the Administration. But we are left with the clear impression that these things took place, in effect if not in a specific form.

It's a view of how the world works that mistakenly empowers particular, and evil, forces with the ability to determine the course of events, and it misses the messiness and contingency with which life actually unfolds. As Hofstadter put it, "Unlike the rest of us, the enemy is not caught in the toils of the vast mechanism of history, himself a victim of his past, his desires, his limitations. He is a free, active, demonic agent. He wills, indeed he manufactures, the mechanism of history himself, or deflects the normal course of history in an evil way." One doesn't have to deny the horrors of the story to see it as not so neatly explicable. Tragedy is more profound if it is permitted to entail not just malignancy but also people screwing up. ♦



"Living Room." Park Güell, Barcelona.
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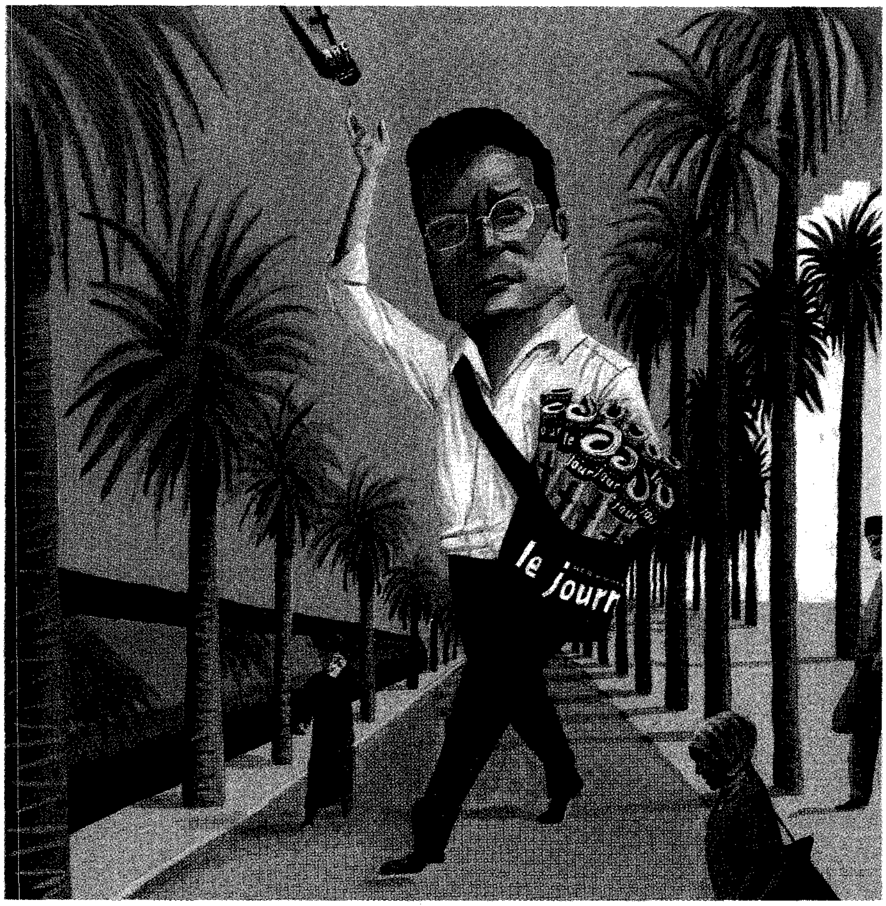
LETTER FROM MOROCCO

THE CRUSADER

A Moroccan journalist takes on the King.

BY JANE KRAMER

Aboubakr Jamaï publishes a newsweekly out of Casablanca. It's written in French and called *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*—the weekly paper—though people who read it just say *Le Journal.* You would be hard put to confuse *Le Journal* with any of the other Moroccan weeklies, most of which devote themselves to the virtues, real, anticipated, or imagined, of the king, Mohammed VI, and his old school friends who control the court, and the government of what he once accurately, if inadvertently, described as an executive monarchy. Jamaï's weekly is a thorn in the side of the executive monarchy and, in fact, of most of the executives in a country where corruption is endemic, and business at almost every level is conducted according to a time-old ritual exchange of cash for favors. *Le Journal* is stubbornly uncorrupted and unbeholden. It is critical, confrontational, exasperating, angry, and didactic, and, like Jamaï himself, not much loved by the people who seek power in Morocco.

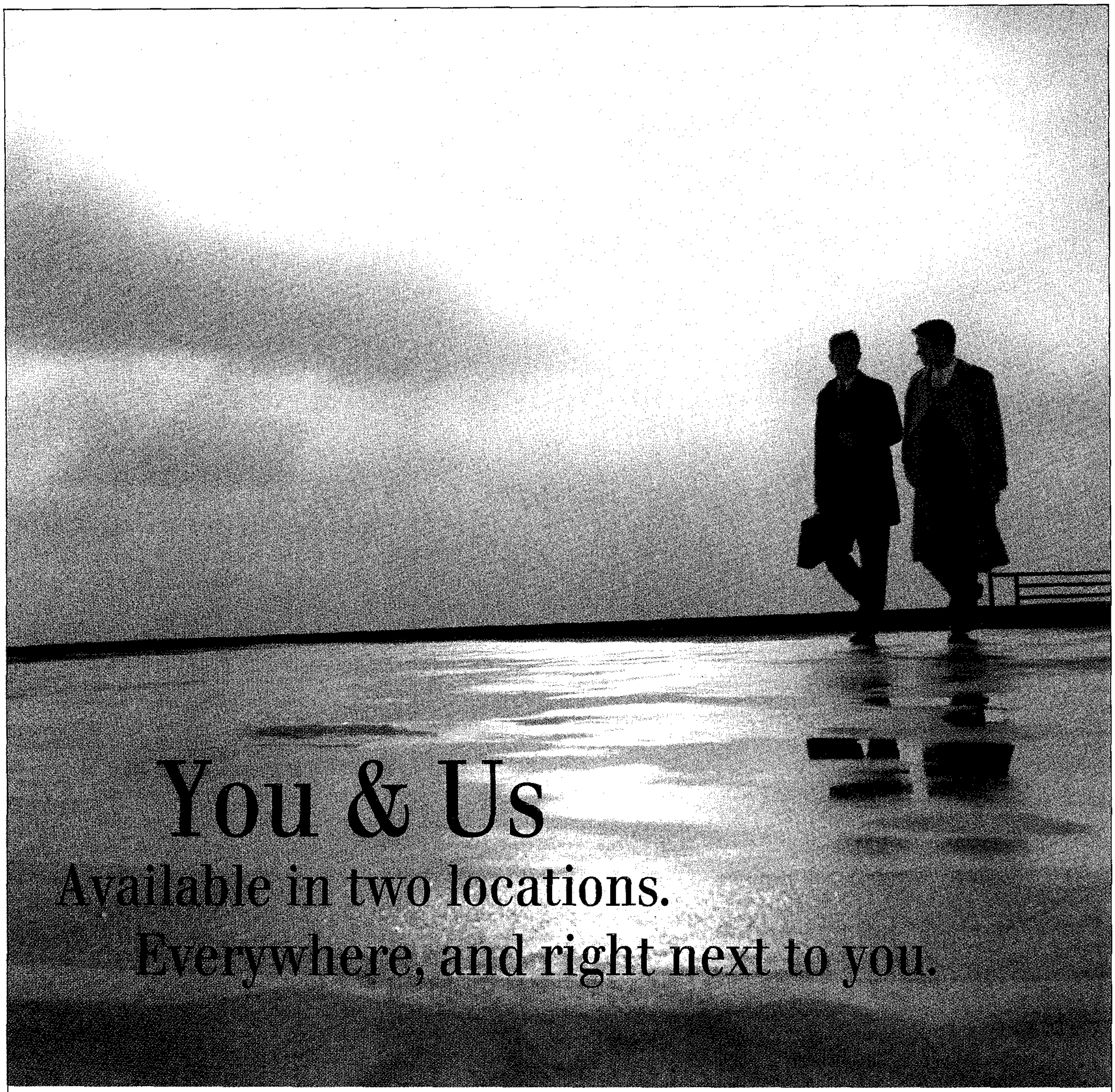


A friend says that Aboubakr Jamaï is "the one who tells the regime, 'You are lying.'"

MARK ULRIKSEN

Jamaï founded his magazine in 1997, a year and a half before the death of Mohammed's famously despotic father, Hassan II. He was twenty-nine then and, like most young Moroccan intellectuals, had expected "great changes" from Mohammed. His disappointment is evident in the editorials he writes for every issue of *Le Journal:* "Sire . . . We do not understand your treatment of dissident voices or the perpetuation of your control over the broadcast media. . . . We do not understand why you do nothing about the extortions of your police or the iniquitous 'justice' rendered in your name." He says that, seven years into Mohammed's reign, "we are not yet a constitutional democracy, not even a true constitutional monarchy." He likes to remind Westerners that, whatever image they take away of a country in a new era of democracy and entrepreneurship and economic freedom, the parliament remains a rubber stamp for the monarchy, with no powers of its own, and the King's control of the economy is nearly total. The biggest holding company in Morocco belongs to Mohammed VI and his family. According to *Le Journal*, he controls more than fifty per cent of the capital invested in Morocco's stock market, not to mention (with a group of demonstrably loyal families) as much as eighty per cent of the country's agricultural production. Perhaps even more important, he controls, through his various ministries, the appointments and licenses and permissions that could let in a small measure of competition. He maintains eight royal palaces and innumerable estates; the royal budget, paid for by Moroccan taxes, runs to two hundred and fifty million dollars a year. The average yearly income in Morocco is fifteen hundred dollars.

Mohammed is also, to those liberals who do support him, the last bastion against an Islamist revival that has been sweeping across North Africa since he came to power. They are careful to praise him publicly, whatever they say in private. Jamaï is the exception—"the one who tells the regime, 'You are lying,'" his friend Fouad Abdelmoumni, who runs a micro-credit association that provides cheap loans to Morocco's poor, told me—and he is paying for it. At one time or another during his magazine's short history, it has been banned, seized by the police, boycotted by advertisers, abandoned by printers, targeted for demonstrations, and attacked by the state media and by most of its own competitors; and Jamaï himself has been hit with so many lawsuits and convictions that his debts today amount to a million and a half dollars in fines, damages, and back taxes—arguably disastrous for a publisher with twelve reporters, a print run of twenty-five thousand copies, and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"You can't spend your political life hiding behind being Canadian."

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a loss of eighty per cent of his advertising revenue in the past six years. A defamation lawsuit that ended in April left Jamaï with damages alone amounting to three hundred and fifty thousand dollars—the largest press penalty in Moroccan history. The trial was ludicrously pro-forma, and had the case been heard in Europe, where the magazine has a small but influential audience of North African dissidents, journalists, and civil-rights activists, Jamaï's punishment would probably have been a symbolic euro and a dressing down by the presiding judge.

In Europe, of course, Jamaï would be considered a normal journalist on a regrettably headstrong tear. But in Morocco "normal" is a sometime concept, and the definition of defamation can have more to do with the friends and the politics of the man you offend than with any law against offending him. There is no strong journalistic tradition behind magazines like Jamaï's—no "freedom of information," no public access to information, not even a paper trail for good reporters to trace. As often as not, they run with what they "know," or think they know, rather than with what they can document. In this, Morocco is no different from most of the other countries in North Africa and the Middle East that are not under iron censorship, countries where journalists are free to negotiate, at their peril, the shifting continuum of what is usually referred to as "the transition," and quickly discover that the transition to a free press is like Zeno's arrow or Lenin's revolution—a process that never ends.

Compared with some of its neighbors, Morocco could be called progressive in terms of press freedom. Jamaï thinks it is simply more sophisticated—you could say legalistic—in its repression. Jamaï has lived as a student in Paris. He put in a year at Oxford, getting an M.B.A., and a year at Yale, as a World Fellow. He knows that the work he does is what Western journalists are supposed to do—think twice about what passes for reality. Watch groups in the West complain constantly and officially about the harassment of *Le Journal*—about the ruinous fines, the rushed hearings, the summary judgments, the reluctance of some judges to even call, let alone admit, defense witnesses. Newspapers in Europe report faithfully on every trial. Jamaï is in touch with them all, and in fact spends a good deal of time feeding them information. Occasionally, it helps. A few years ago, he published an interview with a former Interior Ministry secret agent who claimed not only that Mehdi Ben Barka—a much loved socialist politician exiled by Hassan II in 1963 on charges of plotting against the monarchy, and kidnapped in Paris two years later—had died under torture but that his body had been spirited out of France by the Moroccan Embassy. It may be that what saved *Le Journal* from a trial then was simply the fact that *Le Monde* had published the same story on its front page.

Seven or eight years of a barely disguised campaign to shut Jamaï down have left him frustrated and on the attack, and, for his friends, even a little dangerous to defend. Sitting in a restaurant with him is an object lesson. Important people rush over to embrace him. They are full of admiration. They say that he makes them proud to be Moroccans, and ask him what they can do to help. But they leave fast, in case he might actually think of something. Jamaï often talks about coming to ground for a year or two in a "normal place," writing a book, say, or starting a doctorate in politics or history. He means a place where being an investigative journalist doesn't constitute some freakish sort of indiscretion—"where no one looks at me and says, 'What's wrong with Boubker? Why doesn't he relax?' "

Boubker is Jamaï's nickname. It is a common elision of "Aboubakr" and also, for his family and friends, a reference to Sergey Bubka, the Ukrainian pole vaulter and Olympic gold medalist who became a Third World icon when Jamaï was a would-be hundred-metre track star, in Rabat, dreaming of the Olympics himself. It is a mark of his notoriety as Morocco's best-known crusading journalist that when people in Casablanca or Rabat say "Boubker" they expect you to know which Aboubakr they mean. Jamaï still looks more like a graduate student than like a crusader. He is tall, pale with fatigue, and, by his athlete's standards, woefully out of shape; his main exercise these days is playing Spider-Man with his two small boys on weekends. He has wavy brown hair, cut short and practical. He wears squared-off rimless glasses, and his clothes, at the office, usually run to shirtsleeves, dark khakis, and shoes that on a good day match. (He wears floppy bab-

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ouches at home.) He is eloquent in whichever of his three or four languages he happens to be speaking, and most of the time he is reasonable and attentive. But he is also a Jacobin—unforgiving when he feels betrayed or injured or provoked. His family is well known and well connected, but he is uneasy on the Casa-Rabat social circuit, where smart people and powerful people occasionally cross paths. He has no aptitude for small talk, except when it comes to sports and movies. He runs his life the way he runs his magazine, ignoring the rituals of useful hypocrisy and sometimes of common sense. The last big party he went to was a dinner in 2001, where, I have heard, he berated an old friend (a state television executive who is now the general director of all Moroccan broadcast media) to the point of tears. His wife, Leïla Aït Hmitti, who claims to have given up trying to socialize him, describes him dryly as "very serious."

Jamaï and his friends and enemies inhabit a very small world, given that there are thirty million people in Morocco, six or seven hundred newspapers and magazines, and, by all accounts, a total of only three hundred thousand readers. Reduce that to the number of people who do their reading in French, and you arrive at thirty or forty thousand dinner tables in the big cities like Casablanca and Rabat. But they are the tables that count, and *Le Journal* reaches them all and, in some ways, leads the conversation. It has enormous influence, if not on the exercise of power then on the level of disclosure, dissatisfaction, and dissent. It is part of a system that Mohamed Tozy, who teaches political science at the university in Casablanca, calls "treason by intimates."

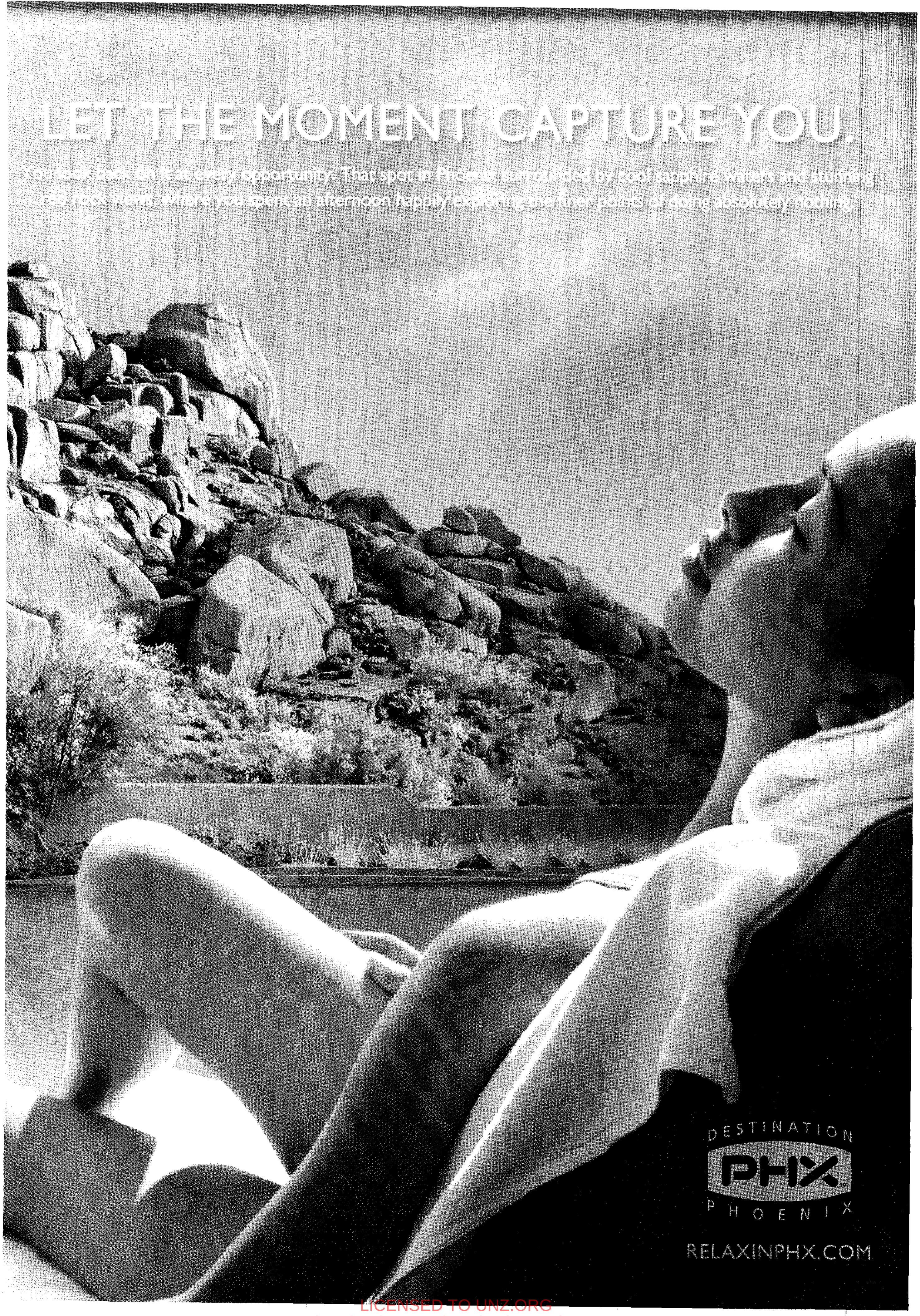
Driss Ksikes, a Casablanca novelist (and *Le Journal* alumnus), has just spent six years as the editor of *TelQuel*, Morocco's only other independent French-language weekly. Ksikes told me that a decision was made at *TelQuel*, early on, to stay away from "what we were or what we should be and to concentrate on showing what we are." He called it making "a simulacrum of democracy" in a country without democracy. (I have heard it said that the difference between *TelQuel* and *Le Journal* is that *TelQuel* claims the space available for press freedom, whereas *Le Journal* claims the "ideal space.") "We crack the social taboos," Ksikes said, meaning the taboos that the palace has no particular interest in preserving—taboos having to do with sex or dress or liquor or drugs, and with what in Arabic is called *hashuma*, the culture of silence and shame. What interests him is the polyglot, contradictory Morocco hidden under the politics of national identity and monarchic purpose—the politics that absorb Jamaï. It is illegal, for instance, to sell liquor to a Muslim, but supermarkets stock it and Muslims drink openly in restaurants and hotels. You will never see a couple kissing on the country's main television channel, but this summer you could go to a movie called "Marock" and watch a Muslim girl and a Jewish boy have sex. That movie came out when I was in Morocco. The theatres were full, the Islamists were protesting, and *TelQuel*, predictably, ran a provocative cover—the girl in shorts and a spaghetti-strap T-shirt; her brother on the floor praying—and a story about the travails of the young woman who directed it. *Le Journal* ran a solemn editorial about freedom, censorship, and dissent.

Jamaï makes no compromises, and expects the same of his staff. It is a lot to ask, though when a reporter errs, as it were, on Jamaï's side of a story, Jamaï covers for him and takes the blame himself. "The saintly image of Boubker is pretty true," Amine Rahmouni, who spent seven years writing for *Le Journal*, told me. "You have a sort of license to argue with him—you never feel the hierarchy—but if you are not deeply committed to the direction, to what it means, you leave." The turnover is high. Reporters who quit, as Jamaï's brother, Mohammed, did in January, after a year of chasing down financial scandals, will say that their boss was too avid, or too judgmental, in his investigations. Jamaï says that his brother, for one, was simply "not ready to be a martyr" to the cause of a better country. In the event, those reporters were not ready to be martyrs with straitened salaries, no benefits, and what Jamaï calls the sword of Damocles hanging over their jobs. The ones who stay, Rahmouni told me, "will be able to say, 'I was there.'"

Weekday mornings, Jamaï leaves his apartment in a pleasant Casablanca neighborhood and drives to a small, shabby building at the end of an alley off the Avenue de l'Armée Royale—the city's busiest commercial street. *Le Journal* rents four rooms on the second floor. You enter the newsroom through an unmarked door off an unlit corridor. You have to know that it's there to find it, and that is how Jamaï likes it. He thinks of his four rooms as a kind of psychic fortress against a world of compromise. The walls of his office, off the newsroom, are hung with journalism awards he has won abroad, among them an International Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists. They are there, he says, as much for his own encouragement as to impress his visitors—though of course they do.

There is also a prayer rug in the office, folded on top of his file cabinet. To the surprise of most Westerners who know Jamaï as a fierce proponent of the separation of church and state, he is not only a practicing Muslim—"the only one in my family"—but, in some ways, exceptionally devout. He drank his last glass of wine at the age of twenty. He never breaks Ramadan. He prays five times every day. ("What defines my day is prayer," he once told me. "I don't feel comfortable when I don't pray.") He says that he "discovered" religion through his paternal grandfather, an Islamic scholar and a legendary Moroccan patriot—one of the founders of Istiqlal, the Moroccan independence movement. Jamaï adored him. "I used to go to his house for dinner," he says, "and he would ask me, very gently, 'So, have you begun to pray?' One summer—I was sixteen or seventeen—I said, 'Maybe I'm interested.' He taught me the Sura al-Duha, which says that God found you an orphan and nourished you. He said to remember that praying for praying's sake is your contractual relation with God—that He will never abandon you, just as you must never abandon your humanity. I found this wonderful. I began reading about liberal Muslims. I reconciled with Islam. I consider myself a Muslim convert."

Last February, Jamaï decided to publish an issue on the aftermath of the Danish cartoon crisis. He called it "The Prophet Muhammad, the Symbol, the Passions." He approached the crisis from every angle. He included Persian miniatures of Muhammad, to make the point that there was nothing in the Koran itself to prohibit representations of the Prophet—that the question of image in Islam had many interpretations. He ran interviews with intellectuals like Olivier



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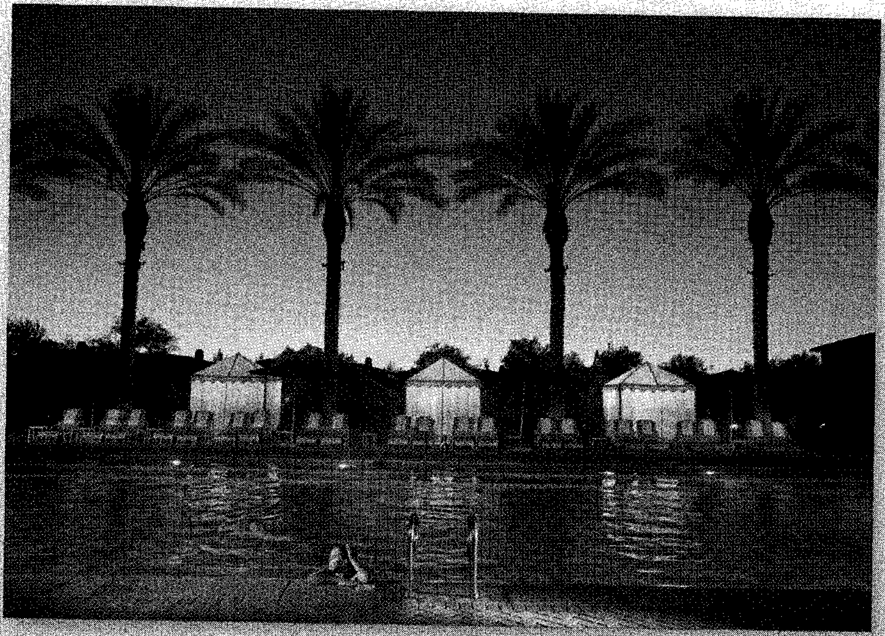

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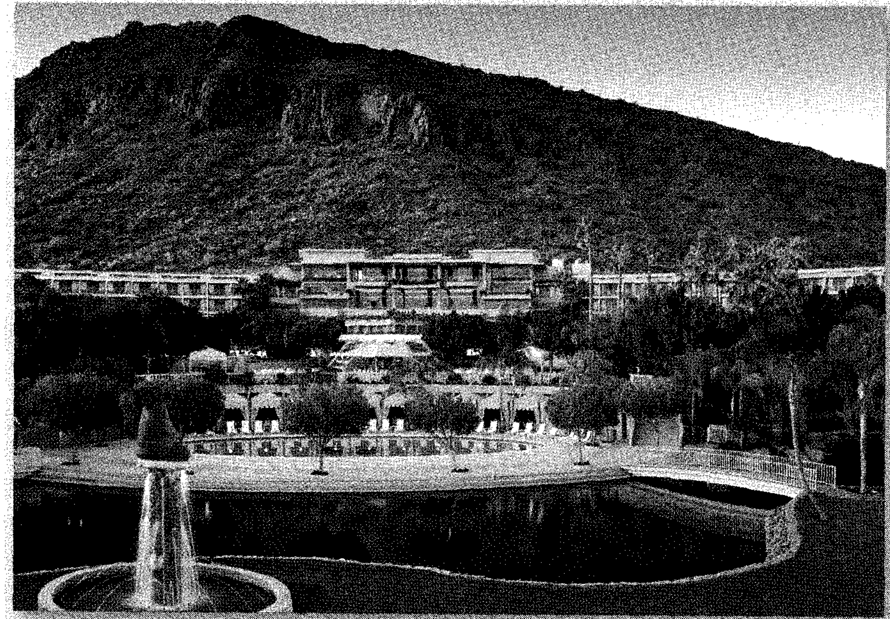

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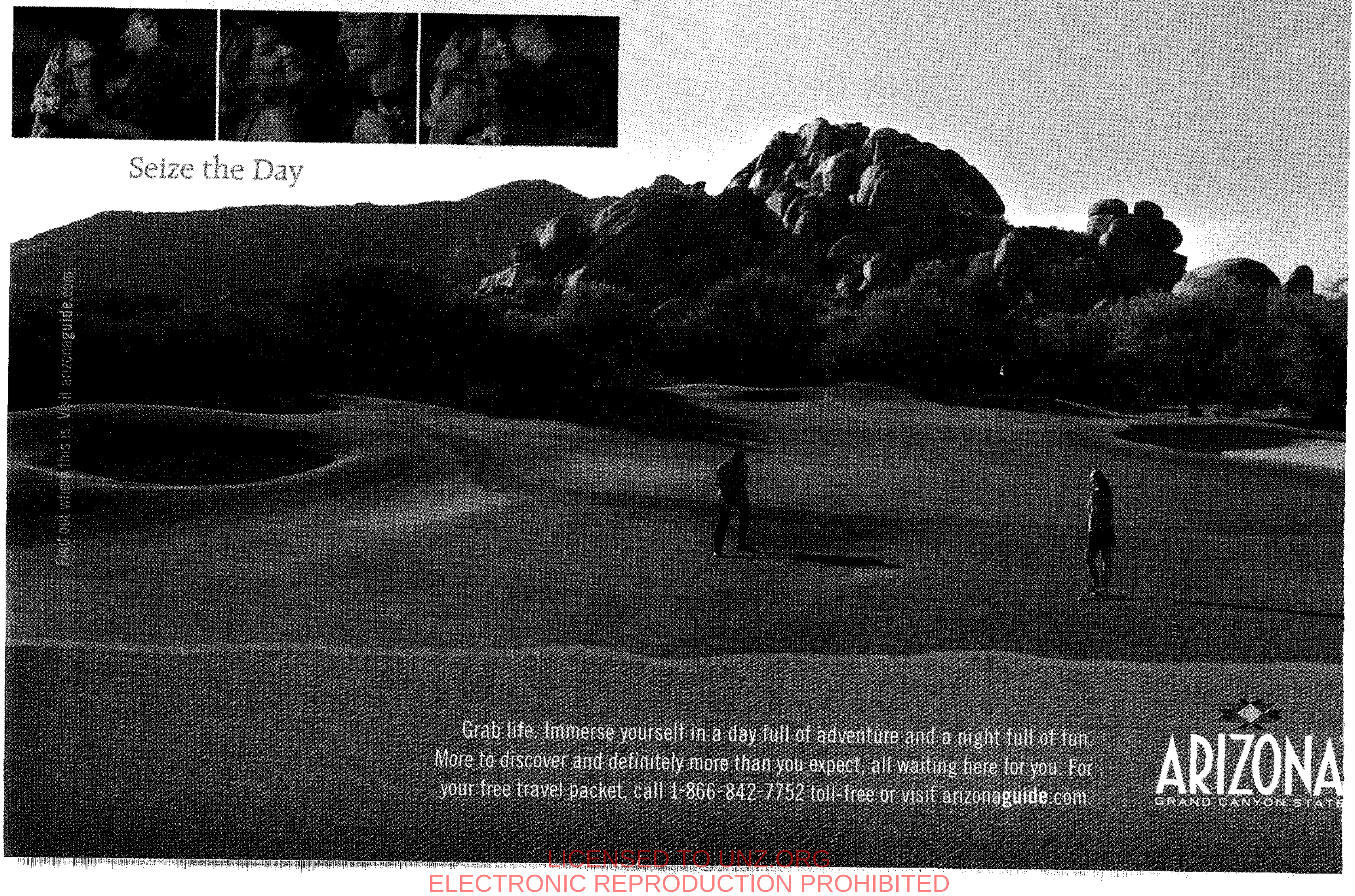

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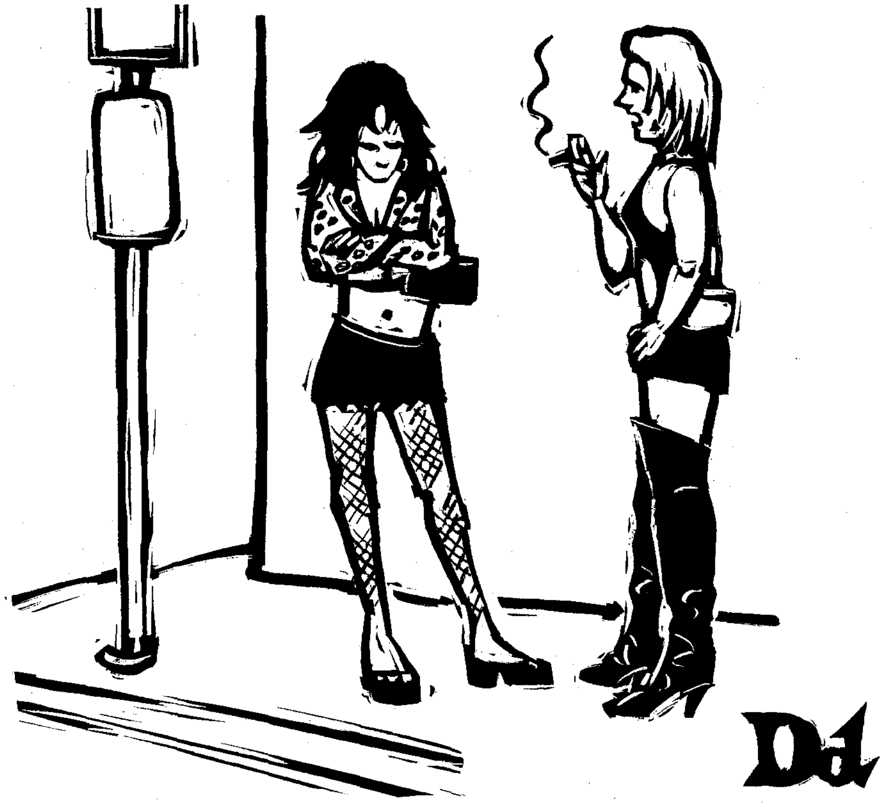
Roy on the political manipulation of the crisis. He reported on the orthodox-Muslim reaction—the demonstrations and the riots, the deaths and the fires. He said that Moroccans were almost unanimously offended by the cartoons. It was their right, as Muslims, to be offended—or not to be. Jamaï himself was offended, but he is opposed to censorship and to blasphemy laws and even to the idea of blasphemy. He describes himself as a free-speech fundamentalist, and at the time he saw no reason not to inform his readers of what, as he saw it, the proper response, to news, of a newsmagazine should be. With this in mind, his editor-in-chief, Ali Amar, included a small photograph, from Agence France-Presse, of a man holding open the newspaper *France Soir*, which had just reprinted the cartoons. "We're talking two millimetres by two millimetres," Jamaï says, describing the cartoons by the time the photograph was reduced and reprinted in *Le Journal*. "But when I saw the magazine at the printers I said, 'I won't gamble with this, I won't take this risk.' I hired twenty guys, who worked all night and managed to ink out the cartoons on twenty-five thousand copies. It was inevitable that a few got through."

The magazine went on the newsstands late that weekend, and by Monday morning a small crowd had gathered in front of the parliament building, in Rabat, to protest. That night, one of Morocco's two state television channels, 2M, ran the protest on the evening news. Three million people watched it—though not Jamaï, who had taken his wife, Leïla, to a Woody Allen movie—and they heard that *Le Journal* was making Moroccans lose respect for the sacred values of their country. The next morning, in Casablanca, a convoy of city vans and buses—commandeered by a group of men whom Jamaï recognized as Interior Ministry *moqadems*, or neighborhood prefects—carried a hundred angry people from the city's shantytowns to the alley in front of *Le Journal*, where they started calling for jihad and waving placards and hurling insults at Jamaï, at the magazine, at Danes, at Jews. Jamaï went out to confront them. "I wanted to show the regime I wasn't scared," he says. "I wanted to identify the leaders." He retreated fast, seeing how unlikely it was that any of the demonstrators had actually read *Le Journal*, or, for that matter, could have, or would have, spent the equivalent of nearly two dollars for a magazine addressed to the country's Francophone upper class. Jamaï maintains that they had been rounded up by the prefects, and that some of them even thought they were demonstrating at the Danish Consulate. Their demonstration turned into a two-hour siege, with the prefects watching. And 2M ran it on the news that night, along with an interview with Omar Essayed, a singer of almost mythic reputation among the city's poor. The interview had been taped in the studio's garden, but it was folded into footage of the demonstrators, making a kind of "montage," Jamaï says, to suggest that Essayed was with them, protesting. Essayed is a fan of *Le Journal* and, as he said later in the magazine, would happily have demonstrated to support it. But people who watched that night believed that he was talking about *Le Journal* when, asked his opinion of caricatures that attack the Prophet, he replied that, like all Moroccan Muslims, "I strongly condemn any attacks on our religious values, most notably concerning the Prophet."

Jamaï blamed the news director of 2M, Samira Sitaïl, for what had happened. Sitaïl had made no secret of her distaste for *Le Journal*—Jamaï says that no one representing the magazine has appeared on the channel since she got there—and he devoted a good part of the next issue to 2M. He published an open letter from his wife. ("I have always stayed separate from the magazine," Leïla told me. "But I had to speak. I said that my sons would grow up to be proud of what their father had done, and I hoped that one day the sons of the people who did this to Boubker would be able to feel the same way about *their* parents.") He accused the network of "Goebbels's tactics" and Sitaïl of acting on Interior Ministry instructions; one column accused her of putting not only Jamaï's family but his staff and their families in danger with her provocations. Sitaïl sued him for defamation before he could sue her for what he calls "abusing her function as a public servant." (He never did.) In late July, he was found guilty and ordered to print the judgment in *Le Journal* and in *Assahifa al-Ousbouiya*—an Arabic-language weekly that he launched in 1998. There were no damages to speak of, something like eleven dollars, but the judge imposed a fine of twice the limit set by Morocco's press laws. It was twelve thousand dol-



"How were you supposed to know he was the sex critic for the 'Times'?"

"We're walking for the common cold."

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lars, not much compared with the magazine's huge debts. But, given that Mohammed VI has no affection at all for his country's Islamists, it proved to Jamaï that the state was now willing to use its own enemies to destroy him.

Jamaï was born in Rabat during the reign of Hassan II. Hassan ruled for nearly forty years. He was a brilliant and extremely resourceful ruler, a compliant friend to the West—one of the few Arab leaders to support Israel, and certainly one of the only ones to receive intelligence and technology from Mossad. At home, he maintained a harem and, it is said, steeled his sons to the uses of power, official and unofficial, by having his satraps beat the soles of their feet while the court watched. Like his father and grandfather, he claimed direct descent from Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet. His dynastic title as the twenty-second Alawite king was Commander of the Faithful, which gave him a kind of papal authority over Moroccan Muslims and meant that he could keep both the Islamist extremists and the Marxist republicans at bay by eliminating, in the name of a specifically Moroccan Islam, anyone who challenged his authority. He wore a white djellabah and a fez in public and Italian bespoke in private, played golf, and courted a string of beautiful foreign women, from reporters to movie stars. He also assembled a group of astute, sophisticated, and, in the case of a few, relatively liberal advisers. They were the modern face of the regime. The traditional face was notoriously represented by Hassan's first interior minister, Muhammed Oufkir, who presided over a secret army of spies, torturers, and "eliminators." (Oufkir was himself eliminated in 1972—a party to one of the attempts to assassinate the King.)

Jamaï's father, Khalid, was not a friend to the regime, although he knew everybody in it. He was a socialist and a self-styled armchair revolutionary. And he wasn't at all devout; he was a bon vivant with a taste for good wine, good beaches, and bomber jackets, and, like the King, he had an eye for women. (Jamaï's mother, Badea, divorced him when Jamaï was sixteen.) He was also an outspoken and very popular journalist, a columnist and cultural editor at the old Istiqlal newspaper, *L'Opinion*, so it came as no surprise to anyone—except, perhaps, to Khalid himself—when agents of Oufkir's more durable successor, Driss Basri, dispatched him to a cell in the basement of Rabat's central police station. Aboubakr, who was five at the time, says that for weeks the family didn't know his father's whereabouts, and they never knew that he was being tortured—hung by the ankles and wrists from a rotating pole and beaten, his back herniated, his ears shattered by the blows. Six months later, he was rushed to the hospital, unconscious. When he recovered, he was driven home. He was never charged, and now he writes an incendiary weekly column for *Le Journal*. He says that, even today, Basri calls on the phone to chat, as if nothing had happened. They talk about the new king and his new interior minister. "Basri asks me, 'How do you like these guys?'" Khalid told me. "I say, 'Ouf! They're amateurs. You and Hassan were bastards, but you were *professional* bastards.'"

Khalid Jamaï's crime was to have published a photograph of Moulay Rachid, the royal toddler, and his nanny, as part of a series on the disparity in the lives of rich and poor Moroccans. (They were taking a walk, and Moulay Rachid was caught looking at a group of peasants sitting on the street.) Aboubakr says that his father had broken one of Morocco's three cardinal taboos: you cannot attack the person of the king, which is to say, speak critically—verbally *or* visually—about the monarch, his family, or the institution of the Alawite monarchy; you cannot undermine Islam as the state religion; and you cannot dispute Moroccan sovereignty in Western Sahara. Aboubakr himself has broken them all by now. "It was not a life I expected," he told me. His father wanted him to study engineering. He settled on math and physics, at the University of Paris VI, and for two years never showed up for classes. When he flunked out, he came home and spent four years at a business school in Casablanca. It was, he says, "very good training for running a paper, a lesson in how not to be overwhelmed." His first job was with one of the big Moroccan banks. A year later, he and a couple of friends founded their own bank—Upline Securities. It was the first independent investment bank and brokerage house created under a new banking-privatization mandate, and it was successful to the degree that the big banks, which had been floating on savings accounts and risk-free loans, felt threatened. "Upline should have been a major player," a banker who knows Jamaï well told me. "They made sure that it wouldn't thrive." Jamaï quit after three years, and went to work for Mostafa Terrab, an adviser to the Royal

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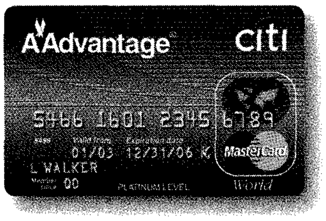

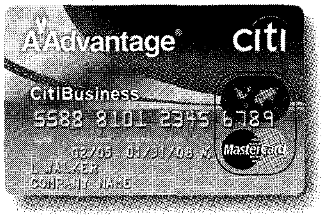

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Cabinet who had just been named general secretary of the Middle East and North Africa Economic Summit. Jamaï gave up a Fulbright to do to it, and says that it was the best decision he ever made. It came at a moment when Hassan II, in the last decade of his life, was beginning the slow process of liberalizing the economy and opening the country to investment, and of what could be called making politics legal.

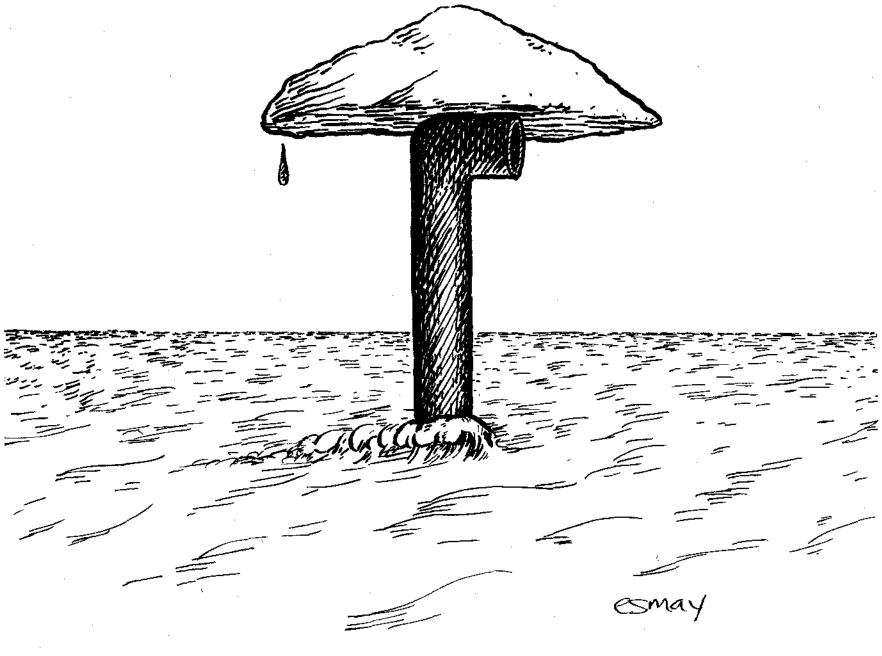
Jamaï had no real interest in politics then. He thought of himself as someone working in economics, like Terrab, and when he started writing—for an uncle at the paper *La Vie Économique*—his subject was the impact of international financial markets on Morocco. A year later, he began looking around for money to start his own magazine. He had two conditions: it would be an investigative magazine, and it would be published in French to attract the educated élite, for whom French was, if not precisely the language of critical thinking that it was for him, the fashionable and persuasive one—the language that impressed them. "Don't forget, I'm an entrepreneur," he says. "It was the conjunction of that and the fact that there was also the political opening, and I knew the communications business would benefit." That opening meant a directly elected parliament, and never mind if the elections were rigged or if the new parliament's only power lay in approving laws written by the palace (or in introducing ones that the palace wanted). There was, suddenly, something resembling a public sphere, and that was what the King, at the age of sixty-eight, seems to have wanted—whether by way of repentance or insight or simply out of an interest in his own survival. Jamaï saw it as a "new connect between capital and communications." He managed to put together a hundred thousand dollars, some of it his own, and in November of 1997 *Le Journal* went on the newsstands. It was tabloid-size. (Now it's a glossy, about the size of this magazine.) It was packed with ads. And it sold for seventy cents a copy.

"We thought of ourselves as a brand, a name that would stand for something, like *El País*, in Spain," Jamaï says. Ali Amar, who has a fifteen-per-cent stake in the magazine, put it this way: "We realized in the first few weeks that we couldn't explain any of the economic and financial problems in this country without real social and political understanding and coverage. So we dug and dug, right down to the problems in governance itself. People said we were militant. But no. We were 'normal,' as Boubker says. *They* were the train that doesn't arrive on time."

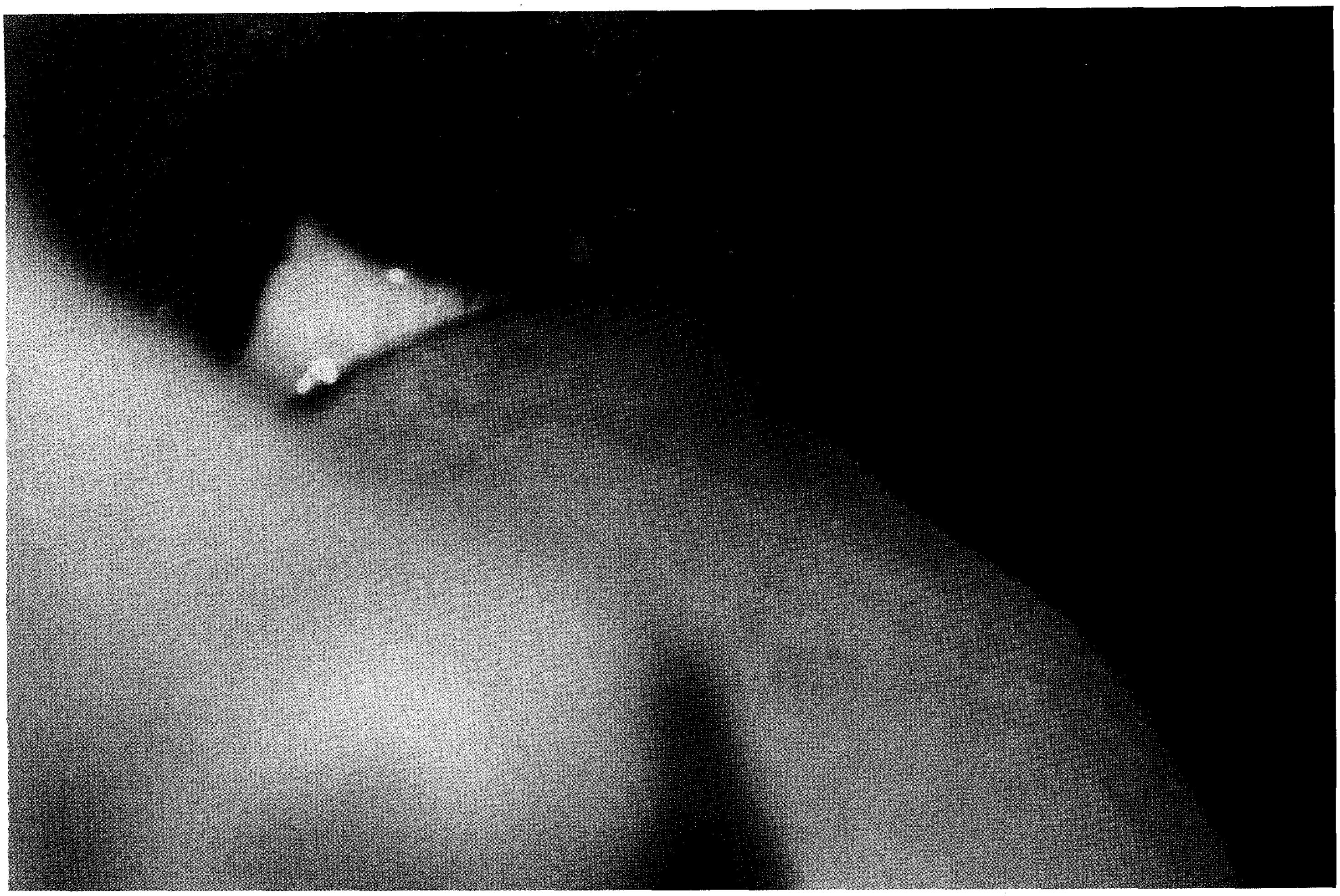
Le Journal's problems began in the spring of 1999, when the country's printers stopped doing business with Jamaï and he had to start printing the magazine in France, and then pay huge transportation costs to import it. (He did this for two years.) The official reason was that he owed a printer money, but the real one was three interviews he had run in recent issues: two with Abraham Serfaty, a well-known Moroccan dissident who was exiled to France after seventeen years in a Moroccan prison; and one with Serfaty's wife, Christine. A year later, the magazine was seized at customs. This time, the official reason was Jamaï's "treatment of the question of Morocco's territorial integrity." Put simply, it was an interview with Mohamed Abdelaziz, the warring leader of the Polisario Front, Western Sahara's independence movement. (Jamaï went back on the stands with a blank white cover and ten blank pages.) Then came the magazine's ban. It lasted forty days (and ended, in January of 2001, with Jamaï two days into a much publicized hunger strike). The reason *this* time was *Le Journal's* publication of an old letter, from a former Socialist dissident, that implicated the Socialists in Oufkir's attempted coup, thirty years earlier.

Around the same time, Jamaï and Ali Amar were sued by Mohammed VI's foreign minister, Mohamed Benaissa, whom they had accused of embezzling public money when he was Ambassador to Washington, in the early nineties; their story involved the purchase of a new embassy residence, from a "dummy company" that Benaissa allegedly owned, for three million dollars more than the company paid for it. Jamaï had made three trips to Washington for the story, combed through housing files, and come home, he says, with enough documents to make his case (though it has to be said that he started making one before he had them). "Just find me one employee of that dummy company," he told the lawyers, "and I'll go to the judge and say, 'O.K., kill me!'" Amar was sentenced to two months in prison. Jamaï got three months, along with fines and damages amounting to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Their sentences were suspended on appeal, and the damages reduced to some sixty thousand dollars, but by then Jamaï owed the court an additional thirty thousand in interest. He paid to avoid foreclosure, although the case itself was still open, pending a decision by the Cour de Cassation, the country's highest court. (He is still waiting for that decision.)

The case that left Jamaï with three



Last Trip Under the Polar Ice Cap



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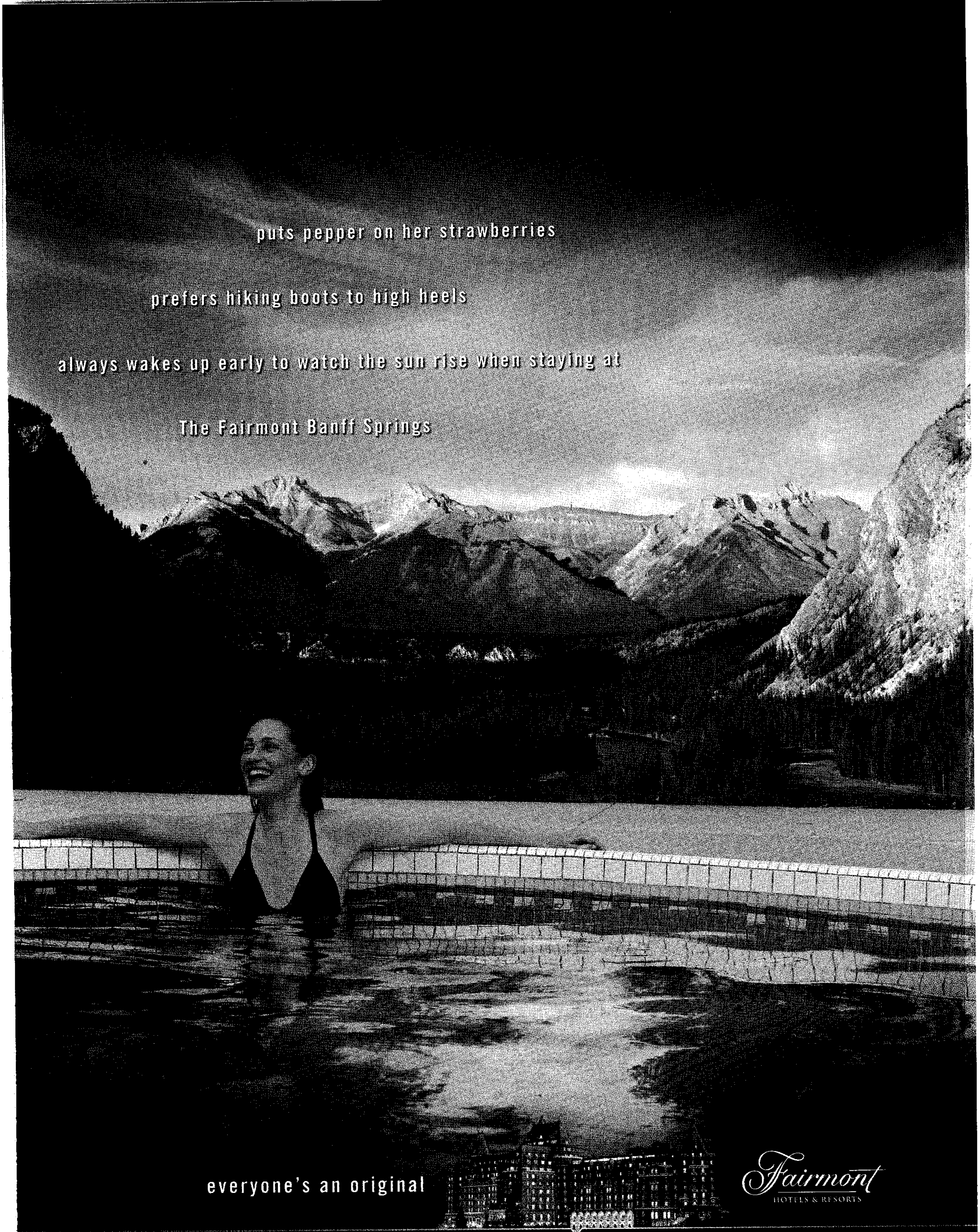
hundred and fifty thousand dollars in damages to pay, and thirteen thousand more in court fines, involved a cover story to the effect that a mysteriously commissioned report on the insurgency in Western Sahara was *téléguidé* (think, remote-controlled) by the palace. He could produce no hard evidence to support this, beyond the fact that the report reiterated the palace view of the Polisario as Islamist terrorists. Nor had the author of the report, Claude Moniquet, a French Jew who runs a security-research business—the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center—in Brussels, made any secret of the fact that he supports Morocco's title to Western Sahara, and considers groups like the Polisario to be threats to the whole region. When I saw Moniquet, in May, in Brussels, he allowed that his commission had had something to do with concerned Moroccans living abroad, but claimed that he would have settled for a quick, public apology from Jamaï. (Jamaï says that Moniquet's lawyer asked for seven pages of *Le Journal*, for Moniquet to defend his research, and wanted a profile of himself, too.) Moniquet still hasn't demanded his three hundred and fifty thousand dollars—he's under a lot of pressure in Europe not to—but he may soon. He claims that Jamaï repeatedly ignored his overtures; and he was hardly mollified when *Le Journal* reprinted a Belgian article that called him a Mossad agent. The mystery of who ordered the report remains unsolved.

Morocco is full of stories about Mohammed VI. The King, at forty-three, is not a statesman, despite a French education and an occasional appearance at the offices of Jacques Delors, in Brussels, when Delors was the president of the European Commission and took on the young prince as a kind of royal intern. Ahmed Sanoussi, a Moroccan comic who has been banned from performing for the past eighteen years, once referred to Mohammed VI as "His Majetski," after the King's favorite pastime, and people use this today as a kind of capsule description—the monarch in one word. It is fair to say that the King is trying to be enlightened. Two years ago, he created a Moroccan version of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, complete with public hearings and promises of compensation, so that Moroccans could bear witness to the abuses of his father's regime. And earlier—apparently at the urging of Jacques Chirac, who told him to do something that would send the right message to the West—he forced through a sweeping reform of the statutes covering the rights of women, and did it over the fierce protests of every Islamist group in the country. (When it was first introduced, a million Islamists, women among them, demonstrated against it in Casablanca.) But rights activists worry that the reform may have done more for the royal image than for Moroccan reality. Khadija Rouggany, a Casablanca lawyer who sits on the board of one of the country's biggest women's-rights groups, told me, "They are insufficient, because their application is so problematic. There is no real infrastructure to enforce them, and no real education among the judges. It's a question of mentality. Now you can even sue for job discrimination, but I've unfortunately never met a woman who has."

According to the polls, the largest legal party in the country today is the Party of Justice and Development, or P.J.D.—the Islamic party. (The largest outlawed party is a self-styled Sufi brotherhood founded by a miracle-working sheikh named Abdesalam Yassine, who claims to be able to walk through walls—not a gift that he managed to demonstrate when he was under house arrest, in Salé, for eleven years.) The P.J.D. won thirteen per cent of the vote in the last parliamentary elections, in 2002; it would win a plurality if elections were held now. The parliament itself hasn't changed—it is there mainly to co-opt dissent—but politicians today enjoy a good deal of authority in the villages and vast shantytowns of a country where the level of education is among the lowest in the Arab world, and the income level not much higher. The political scientist Mohamed Tozy told me to remember that most poor Moroccans are still less interested in liberty than in protection, and the P.J.D. offers them that. It is relatively uncorrupt. Its leaders support the monarchy (supporting the monarchy is a prerequisite for legality) and claim to have no interest in an Islamic revolution. But, like Yassine's followers, its rank and file are often grassroots activists, and, in the manner of Hamas or Hezbollah, they do what neither the palace nor the secular parties nor, for that matter, the government does—they look after the Moroccan poor. The P.J.D. has grown steadily since Hassan II died, both as a party and as a shadow movement more radical than the Party itself admits to being. And it has grown in particular since the spring of 2003, when thousands of Islamists were rounded up and arrested following a day of suicide bombings in Casablanca that killed more than forty people. Nearly fifteen hundred of those Islamists were prosecuted on terrorism charges; seven hundred were sentenced. (Jamaï says that the number should have been more like twenty.) Last month, the police arrested fifty-six people alleged to be training for "a holy war in the mountains"—among them the wives of two Royal Air Maroc pilots and a woman reported only to have "contacts" with the family of one of the men accused of planning the Madrid railway bombings, in 2004.

You can take a long view or a short view of Moroccan politics. There are long-view liberals who grudgingly support the King, saying that Morocco isn't ready for democracy, that a country where so many millions of people are illiterate, poor, and more than susceptible to radical millennarian recruitment needs at least another generation of education and preparation—and prosperity. They say that you have to balance the risks of real parliamentary democracy—the argument that democracies can vote themselves out of existence, and often have—with the risks of maintaining an autocratic monarchy that nevertheless lets some of those people prosper. Jamaï takes the short view. He is frank about that. He wants to see democracy in Morocco in his generation—or, he says, to hear one really persuasive argument for postponing it. He thinks that the idea of an Islamist threat has been overblown, and often defends the P.J.D., "on the ground that the more you bring people into the agora, the more you weaken the extremes." But even his friends find his vision of "Islamists in the agora" a little naïve; they know that an Islamist party would almost certainly start to erode the separation of church and state in any government it led. Jamaï tells them, with



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"Did you just do a rooster?"

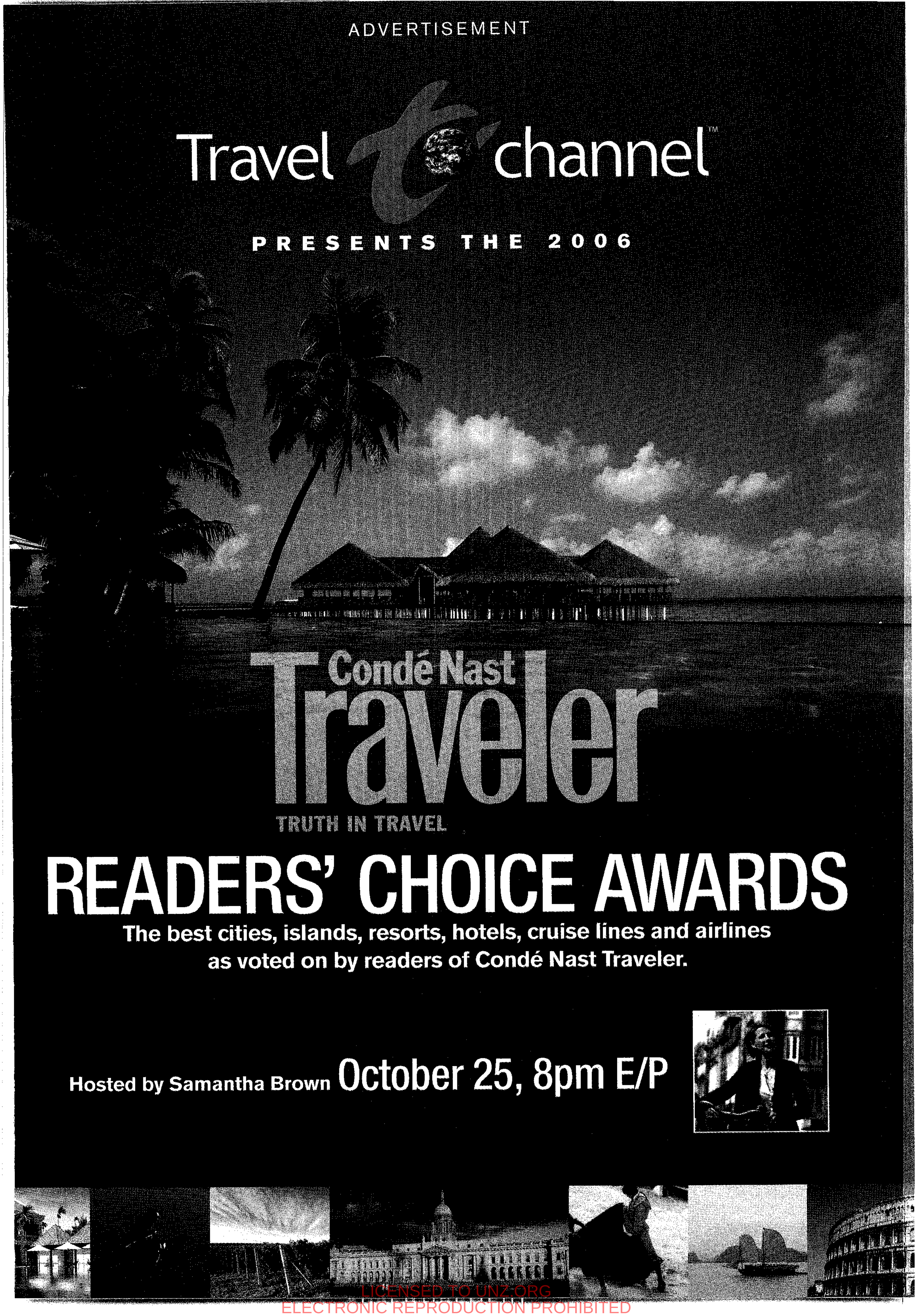
some reason, that in a democracy all voices have the right to be heard.

Many of Jamaï's most powerful friends thrive because of uneasy compromises with the status quo. One said that he had warned Jamaï, early on, to stick to economics at *Le Journal:* "My advice was, This country isn't ready for politics. You can convey everything political you have to say from a purely economic point of view. Now it's war between Boubker and the palace. It's become irrational. I say to the palace, 'If you didn't have Boubker, you'd have to invent him. So engage him. Make him an adviser or an ambassador. And I tell Boubker, 'Don't keep harping on the King's motives and intentions; try to win him over. Be an agent for change. Dole out your medicine in homeopathic doses.' " Another said, "I tell Boubker, 'Your editorials about the King are like Mercurochrome on a wooden leg.' Five or six years ago, I was optimistic, like Boubker. Now you see me disappointed, and I ask myself, Is it really useful to talk about politics anymore? They let you talk politics, but you're supposed to do it without talking about the King, who is ninety-nine per cent of the politics here. The King says, 'We have our own democracy.' But he isn't interested in democracy. The model he has adopted is Dubai. Big growth, no politics. Only businessmen and absolute power. Boubker is alive—*Le Journal* is alive—only because the West is watching."

Early this year, Moulay Hicham Ben Abdallah—a nephew of Hassan II and, by all accounts, more like a son to him in his last years—offered to settle *Le Journal's* debts. Moulay Hicham is third in line to the Moroccan throne. He is also a friend and admirer of Jamaï, or, you could say, someone who honors his obligations. He was banned from the palace, and specifically from the royal presence, soon after Mohammed inherited the throne (his transgressions included a distaste for the practice of royal hand-kissing). A few years later, the secret police concocted a dossier to the effect that he was part of an operation to destabilize the state, and *Le Journal* defended him—and continues to. "MH," as he signs his e-mails, is smart, shrewd, energetic, impeccably educated (Princeton and Stanford), and an ardent democrat. The palace calls him "the Red Prince." His vita includes the United Nations peacekeeping mission to Kosovo; three Africa and Palestine missions for the Carter Center; an Arab-Islamic research institute at Princeton (where he lives now); and a project to produce cheap alternative energy in Thailand. In one way, he would have made an ideal backer—he would certainly have made an interesting king—but Jamaï refused. He said that a windfall from Moulay Hicham "would make it too easy" for the palace—that if the intention was to ruin him he wanted the palace to "see it through and take the consequences" of having its image shattered.

"What's our strategy?" he told me. "It's to make the cost of repression as high as possible." Moulay Hicham put it this way: "In a healthy situation, of course, there would be freedom of expression, which is better abused than curtailed. But we are in an abnormal situation. There are people who want to silence Boubker. What's left? A visible minority. A Moroccan human-rights association. And five or six papers probing the limits of the old red lines with unprecedented boldness. The problem is that they're doing this in a context where no political force supports or reinforces their effort. In the past, the political parties played this role, with the media supporting them. They were the opposition. Now the only source of opposition is a few papers, with Boubker the lightning rod."

Moulay Hicham thinks that Jamaï should enter politics. He said to him, "Boubker, if you want to continue the fight you have to run for Parliament." Jamaï's father, an irrecoverable romantic, wants him to continue the fight at *Le Journal.* He says, "The troubles at the magazine give Boubker his *lettres de noblesse.* He was forged in the fight, like his father and grandfather. He doesn't know it yet, but he's become a militant." Jamaï's banker friends want him to close *Le Journal,* go back to England or America, make a lot of money—and come home free to do anything he likes. They don't really think of him as a journalist; they think of him as the wunderkind who created Morocco's first independent investment bank. Jamaï's wife wants him to take the family abroad, away from politicians and fighters and bankers, to a place where he can study or write his book or simply "lighten up, breathe a little, get some distance from all that's happened to him." Jamaï has his own plans. He is going to turn his Arabic-language weekly, *Assahifa,* into a daily paper. It will sell for twenty-five cents a copy and have the kind of circulation that doesn't depend on advertising. He is talking to businessmen he knows, collecting investors. "We *always* fight back," he says. ♦



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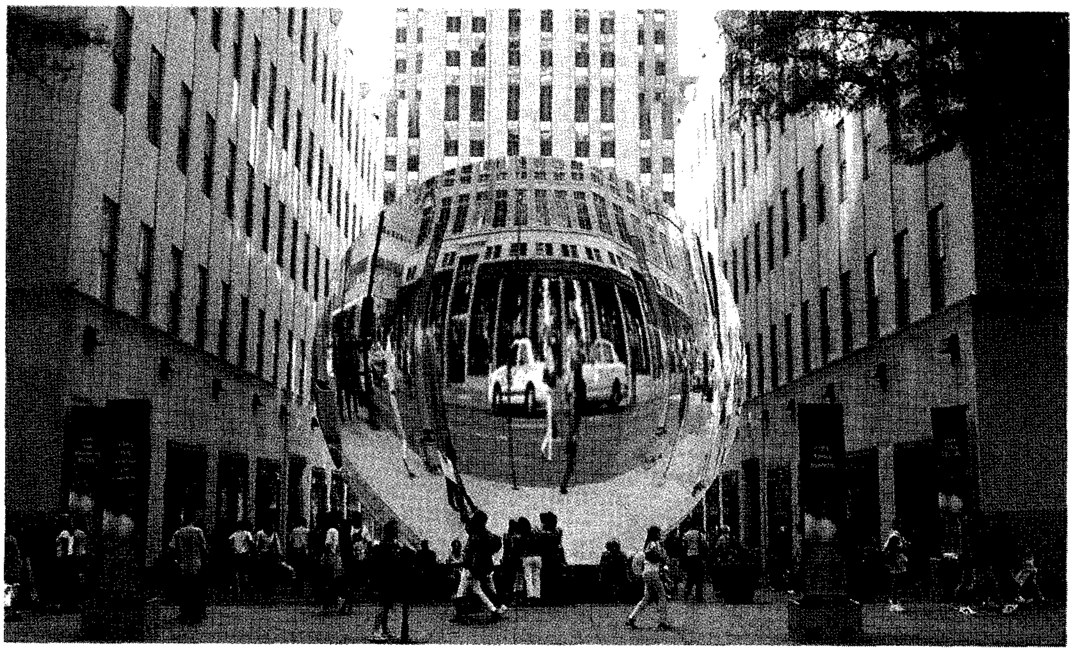
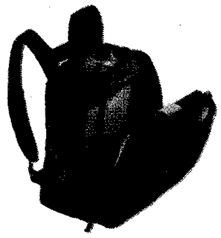
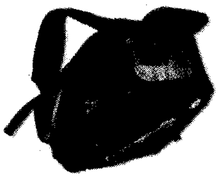
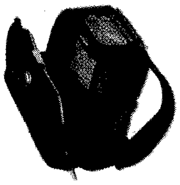


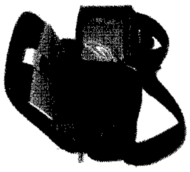
COMPUTER RENDERING OF ANISH KAPOOR'S SKY MIRROR, 2006 SHOWN FROM FIFTH AVENUE FACING 30 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA, COURTESY PERFORMANCE STRUCTURES; POWERPACK IMAGE ©TUMI

The World Reflected









Visitors to Rockefeller Center are taking a second look at themselves and their environment this fall thanks to the *Sky Mirror*, a gigantic polished disc created by artist Anish Kapoor. Sponsored by Tumi and organized by the Public Art Fund, the installation is on display in the landmark's Channel Gardens through October 27th.

The 23-ton, stainless-steel sculpture is mounted on a platform a few feet above street level. Standing nearly three stories tall, *Sky Mirror* reflects the style and exuberance of midtown Manhattan and its international visitors.

"Tumi is excited to present to the world this significant new sculpture by Anish Kapoor," says Laurence Franklin, CEO of Tumi. "I know that all who visit Rockefeller Center to experience this work of art will come away with a new way of looking at themselves and their world." To enhance the experience, Tumi will host an informational kiosk adjacent to the sculpture at Rockefeller Center, a microsite (www.tumi.com/skymirror) and an interactive cell phone game.

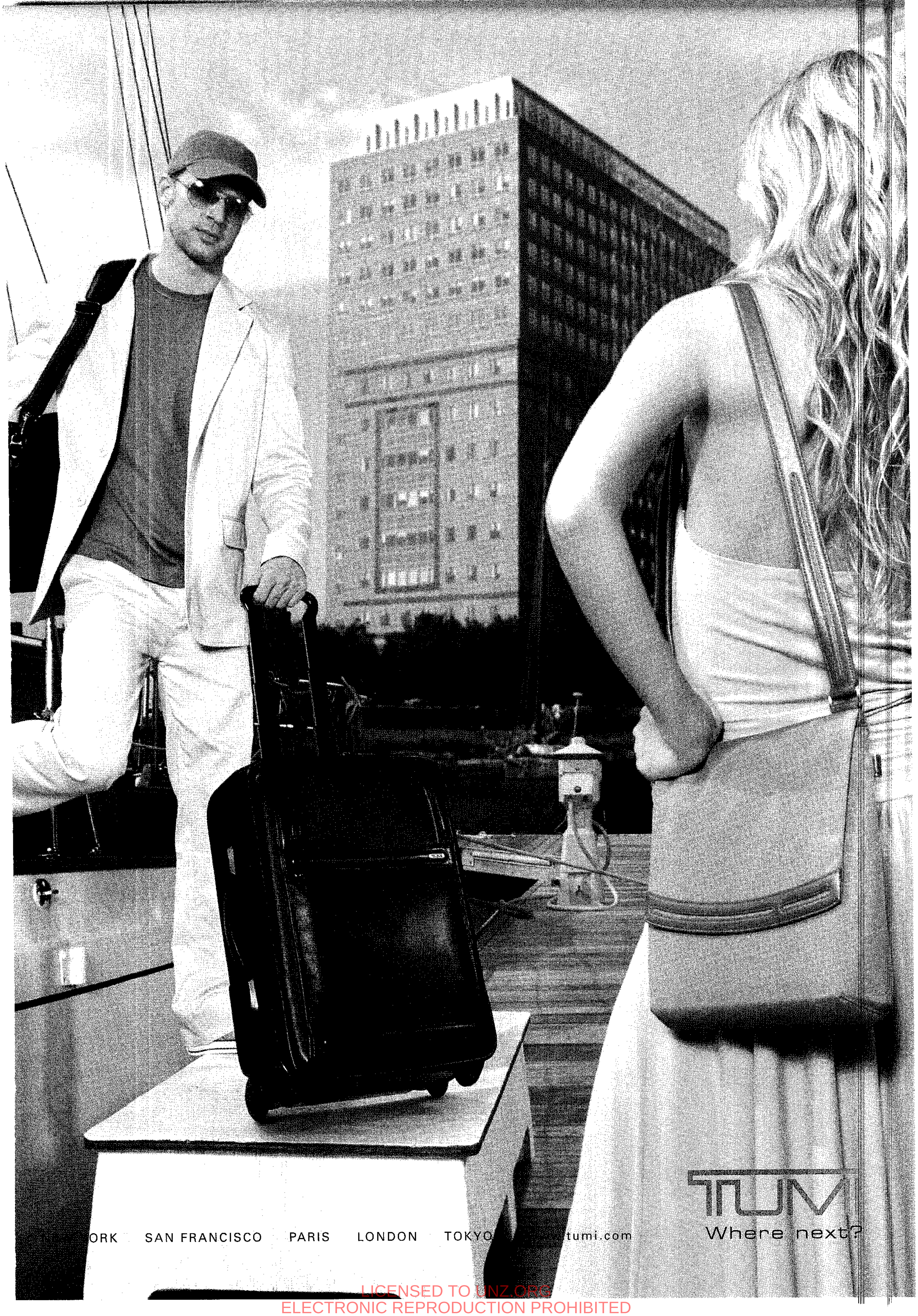
A Twenty-First Century Doctor's Bag

Sky Mirror also reflects Tumi's commitment to design and technical innovation. To coincide with the arrival of the artwork, the brand has introduced a limited-edition PowerPack backpack, a collaborative effort between Kapoor and Tumi. Tumi will donate a hundred per cent of the proceeds from the PowerPack to the international relief organization, Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). "It is an honor and a privilege to have created this bag that will assist the efforts of this global organization," says Franklin.

The PowerPack is a modern spin on the classic doctor's black bag. Its highly functional design was inspired by the needs of humanitarian workers who live and work in challenging environments around the world. Equally useful for multitaskers and so-called flashpackers, the PowerPack's innovative features include a solar panel capable of charging a phone, PDA, iPOD, an electric adaptor that converts voltage in more than eighty countries, a flashlight key fob, removable padded laptop sleeve, and three removable zippered compartments. Interior and exterior accessories pockets are designed to hold other essentials such as travel documents, a camera, and a water bottle.

The PowerPack, priced at $695, is exclusively available at select Saks Fifth Avenue stores nationwide, Tumi stores worldwide, and at www.tumi.com.

SEE MORE AT WWW.TUMI.COM/SKYMIRROR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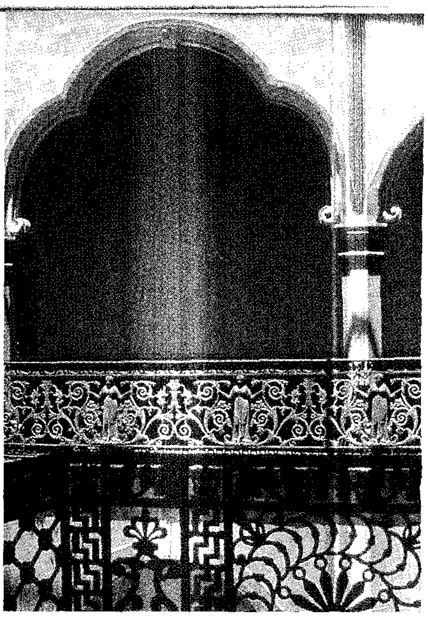

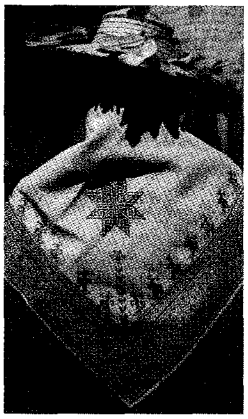

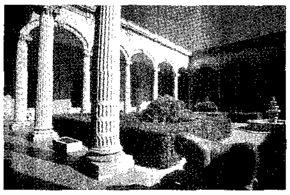

Optical Allusions

FROM THE MAYA CITY of Chichén Itzá to Enrique Norten's steel-and-glass structures, Mexican landmarks span millenia on an awesome scale. For visitors trying to comprehend it all, it's satisfying to find both the vantages that display the art of more than one era and the connections among different styles. A good place to start is in the heart of Mexico City, at the site of **Templo Mayor**, where the Aztecs built seven temples over a two-century period.

A short stroll from the complex, you can walk through the Baroque portals of the **Antiguo Colegio de San Ildefonso**, a former Jesuit school built in the late-sixteenth century. Inside, arcaded courtyards are brilliant with the post-revolution murals of David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco. Diego Rivera painted his mural, "La Creación," here after returning from his first glimpse of pre-Conquest murals at Chichén Itzá.

You can enjoy the largest private collection of works by Rivera and Frida Kahlo at the **Museo Dolores Olmedo Patiño** in Xochimilco, just south of Mexico City. Housed in a grand seventeenth-century hacienda, the museum's diverse galleries let you study hundreds of pre-Hispanic images alongside those painted by Rivera of his wife and of Olmedo, his longtime friend and patron.

Historian Edward Gibbon called Guadalajara "the Florence of Mexico" even before the city's visual riches were enhanced by the **Instituto Cultural Cabañas**, a UNESCO World Heritage site. This neoclassical structure was built by Manuel Tolsá as a Catholic house of charity in the early eighteen-hundreds, with twenty-three courtyards. In the nineteen-thirties, Orozco brought to it the dazzling drama of fifty-three murals, including "El Hombre de Fuego" in the main chapel's dome.

Architecture buffs head for the desert city of **Zacatecas** in the north central highlands to see the extraordinarily ornate façade of the town's pink stone cathedral. Thanks to two museums created here by the twentieth-century artists Pedro and Rafael Coronel, they can also immerse themselves in stunning collections of pre-Hispanic work, Spanish paintings and drawings, and Mexican masks. So that even in this out-of-the-way place, eras intersect to invite and indulge contemplation.

SPIRITUAL SPACES

Among the work of Pritzker Prize winners, that of Mexico's foremost modern architect, **Luis Barragán** (1902-1988), stands out for its quiet serenity. To experience its magical interplay of light, color, and planes, visit Barragán's Mexico City home, now a museum in Tacubaya.

TEMPLO MAYOR MUSEUM IMAGES: ©DANNY LEHMAN/CORBIS; OTHER IMAGES: COURTESY OF MEXICO TOURISM BOARD

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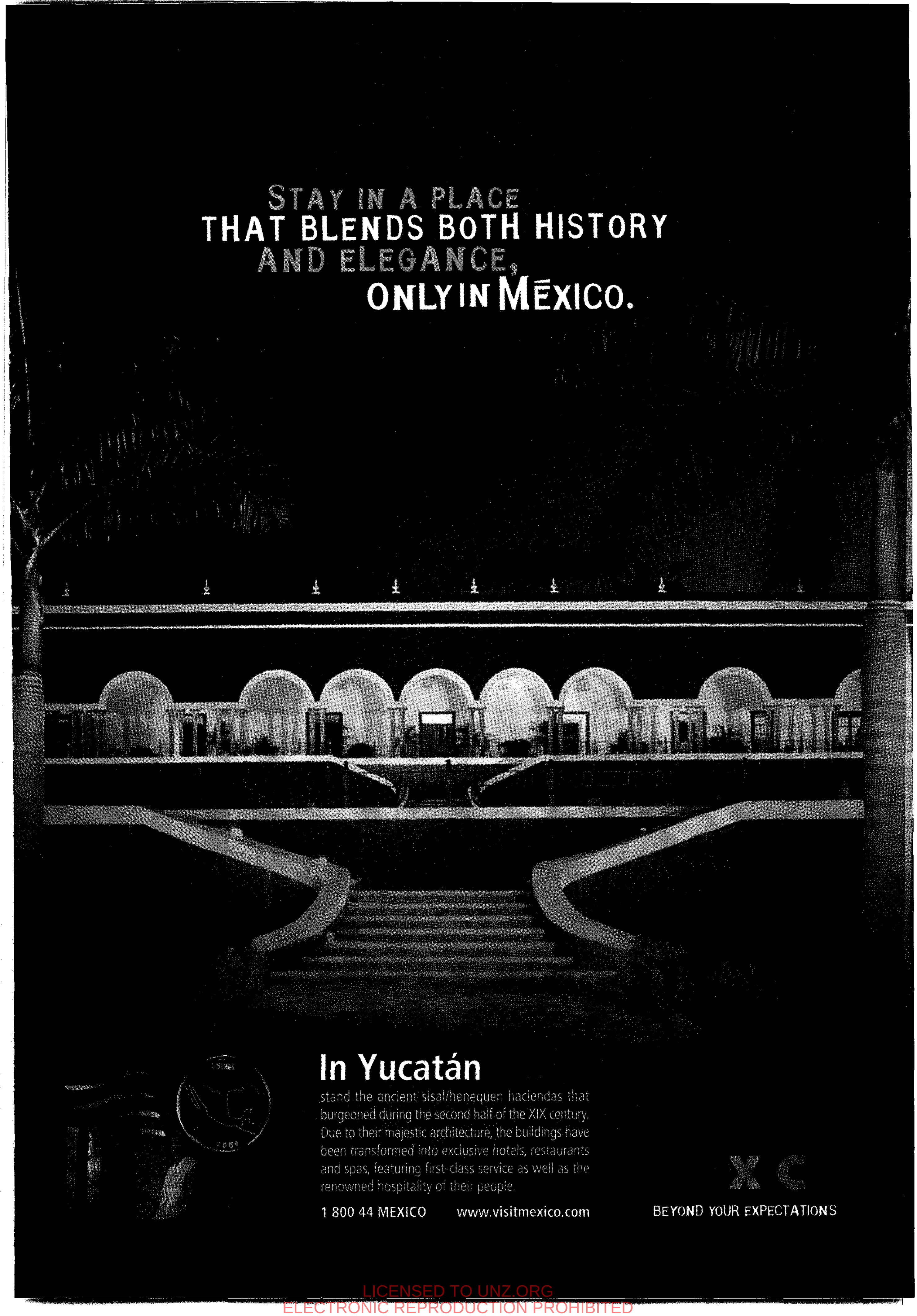
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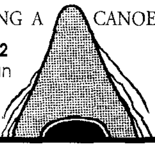
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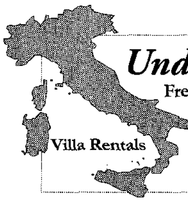
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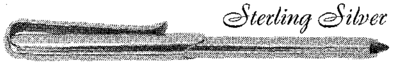
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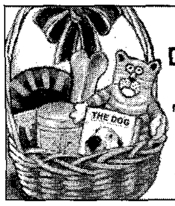
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PERSONAL HISTORY

TABLOID DAYS

An apprenticeship in the gutter.

BY ROBERT STONE

The offices of the *National Mirror* were situated, in 1965, a few blocks down Fifth Avenue from the Flatiron Building. The *Mirror* was one of several imitation magazines and newspapers in a chain known as Countrywide Publications. They were imitations in the sense that their names and cover layouts closely resembled those of other, better known and more popular publications. Countrywide's guiding strategy was to try to confuse a distracted and overstimulated public into buying its periodicals by mistake. The lord of this empire of the ersatz was a man we called Fast Myron. Myron had many such replicant outfits in the Countrywide family, ringer schlock magazines whose names were bogus household words. As an admirer once put it, "If Myron wanted to make a magazine like *Harper's*, he would call it *Shmarper's*."

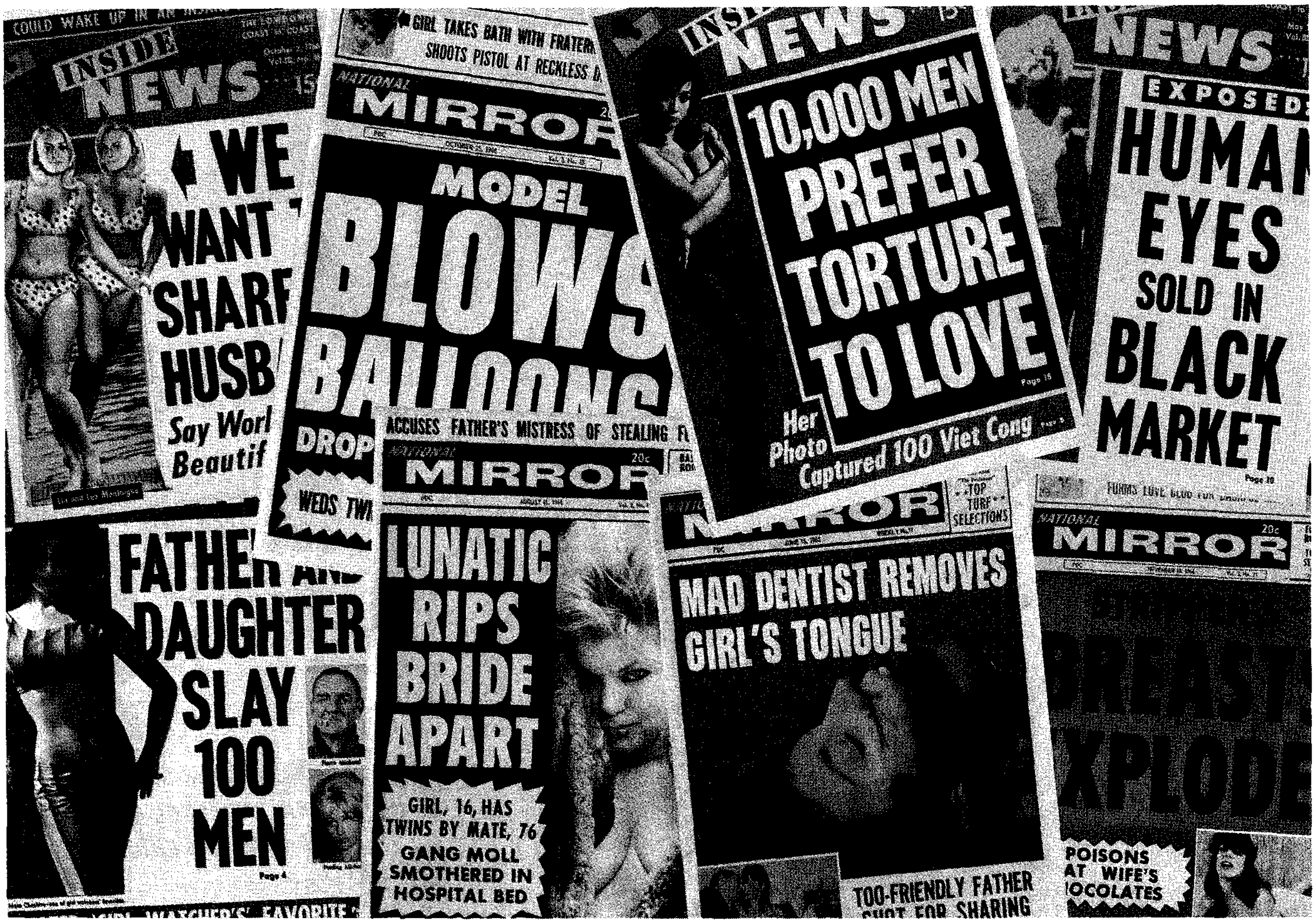
"Mine are better," Myron would say.

Fast Myron's press cartel required the combined labor of about ten men and women, and we often wondered what ironizing aspect of fate had brought us, in mockery of our fading youth and bright hopes, to the crummiest end of Grub Street. The *National Mirror*, perhaps the most successful publication in the group, was what Fast Myron's lawyers defined as "a weekly tabloid with a heavy emphasis on sex." It was an imitation of the *National Enquirer*, though it lacked the delicacy and taste of the original. It did, indeed, offer readers an emphasis on sex, but it had an even greater emphasis on the bizarre, not to say the freakishly improbable. We took malicious pleasure in showing copies of the *National Mirror* to new hires and watching their lips tremble. "Now, the look of the publication may shock you," we'd say. If it didn't, it wasn't for our lack of trying. Eventually, we lost all sense of decent restraint.

Three of us put out the *Mirror*, and each of us claimed some degree of leftist credentials. One of my colleagues was a Maoist mime, who served as a one-man politburo, providing social consciousness as required. "ARMLESS VETERAN BEATEN FOR NOT SALUTING FLAG" was one of his headlines. He also wrote the daily horoscopes, under the byline Haji Baba, which allowed him to espouse principles such as surplus value in his interpretation of the stars. ("Don't be afraid to ask for a raise, Sagittarius! Your boss always keeps some of the value of your labor for *himself!*") The other colleague was a similarly passionate young man who went about in a state of outraged political excitement, and who resembled the actor Zero Mostel.

My own specialty was the composition of headlines, and my weekly aspiration was to make the front page. The trick to getting there was to combine a lascivious or revolting photograph with a headline that was at least equally arresting. Hack writers come and go, but a good art department—one that can reliably fake images using pictures from the photo library—is irreplaceable. It is not true, however, that one sleazy picture is worth a thousand inflated words. Hemingway always said that he learned his trade at the Kansas City *Star*. With this in mind, I should pause for a little reflection on what I learned at the *National Mirror*, beyond the depths of vulgarity of which I was capable. Certain laws obtain in all fictitious enterprises, low journalism included. These are almost moral laws—the way grammar is, in its way, moral. And I have come to believe that language—a line of print, say—is capable of inhabiting the imagination far more intensely than any picture, however doctored. The same applies to novels versus films. No Hollywood flick, no movie of any provenance, could ever provide an experience of the Battle of Borodino as intense as that in Tolstoy's pages. Description allows deeper penetration, attaches itself to the rods and cones of our interior perception. Language is the process that lashes experience to the intellect.

I learned this while working against deadline, trying to get an old horror-movie still to work as my front page. Our one-person art department, serving the entire Fast Myron realm, was a woman I'll call Natasha, an artist of great skill and effrontery. Our prospective cover was a head shot of a slain lady vampire. In order to make the fantasy our own, we asked Natasha to ink out the fangs. In the process, however, she had an accident; ink spilled. Time was running out; the mats had to go to New Jersey to be printed in half an hour. Our front page was a distressed-looking starlet whose mouth was a mass of slop. In black-and-white, the ink looked for all the world like blood.


INSIDE NEWS
WE WANT SHARP HUSB
Say Worl Beautif
GIRL TAKES BATH WITH FRATERN
SHOOTS PISTOL AT RECKLESS D
NATIONAL MIRROR
MODEL BLOWS BALLOONS
DROP
WEDS TWI
ACCUSES FATHER'S MISTRESS OF STEALING FI
NEWS
10,000 MEN PREFER TORTURE TO LOVE
Her Photo Captured 100 Viet Cong
EXPOSED: HUMAN EYES SOLD IN BLACK MARKET
FATHER AND DAUGHTER SLAY 100 MEN
LUNATIC RIPS BRIDE APART
GIRL, 16, HAS TWINS BY MATE, 76
GANG MOLL SMOTHERED IN HOSPITAL BED
TOP TURF SELECTIONS
MAD DENTIST REMOVES GIRL'S TONGUE
TOO-FRIENDLY FATHER SHOT FOR SHARING
POISONS AT WIFE'S CHOCOLATES
BREAST EXPLODE

Some at the Mirror relieved their consciences by smuggling in leftist ideas. All drew comfort from the fact that the stories weren't true.

COURTESY TOM BRINKMANN COLLECTION

I started playing with grotesque headlines, sizing them into the space allowed. Suddenly, driven by hysteria, by Satan, by my Friday-afternoon craving for a paycheck, I had it: "MAD DENTIST REMOVES GIRL'S TONGUE." It fit like a nail!

The story still needed to be written, and I wanted this one for myself.

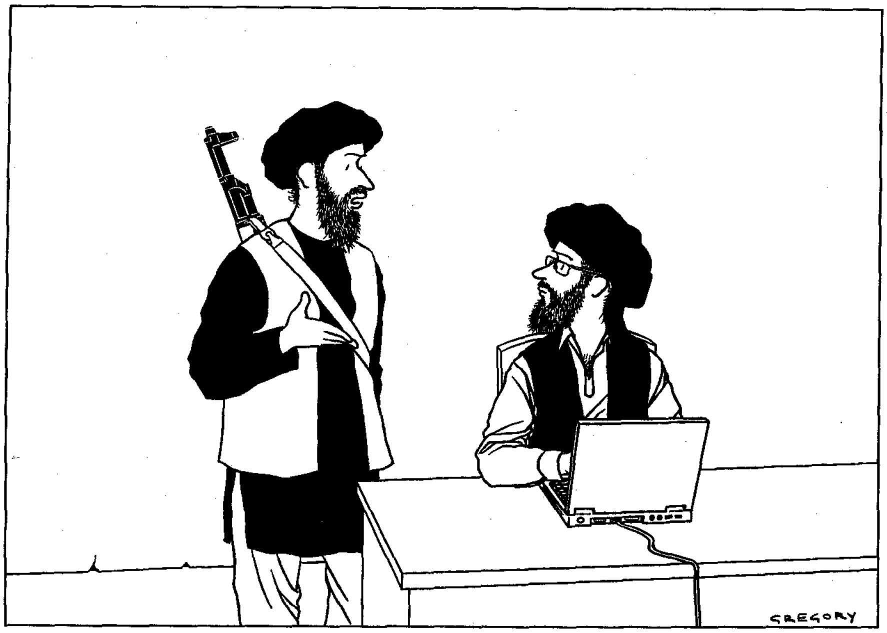
Dateline: Podunk, Alaska, or Gondawooleroo, New South Wales, or Bluebell, Delaware—anywhere that didn't exist. We kept an atlas handy to avoid accidentally hitting on an actual place. By now, the readers (*you*, ladies and gentlemen, not the readers of the *National Mirror*) will have surmised that the great redeeming element in our work—what kept us on the right side of madness—was this: that, lousy as the world might be, things were not so awful that the lunatic nightmares we fashioned had any direct connection with reality, or, as it is sometimes called, the truth.

Anyway, this just in:

> A dentist in Grosenor, Ill., removed the tongue of an attractive young patient last week while the girl was under general anaesthetic.
>
> The police responded to a frantic call by the receptionist for dentist Milton Ingermill, 47. Ingermill's assistant, Miss Harriet Crager, 24, had accidently walked in on the dentist's gruesome operation on patient Mildred Purser, 20. . . . "Miss Purser's mouth was opened wide," the dental assistant described. . . . "I could see the stump of the tongue, with its jagged edge and strands of blood vessels hanging loose."
>
> Miss Crager went on to tell how Ingermill had begun to undress the young girl, who was down to her underwear when the assistant returned. . . . "As I looked around in the direction of Doctor Ingermill I saw the most disgusting thing possible to imagine," Miss Crager continued.

Here space and custom required a photograph of Dr. Milton Ingermill. Working against the clock, we shuffled through our gallery of pictures of creepy people. The weirdest, nuttiest person we could find was a nineteenth-century novelist. Since the novelist had never been a resident of Utah—which we mistakenly believed was the only American state in which dead people could sue—we were home free.

Our photo file had many morbid pictures of deceased individuals undergoing the gruesome horrors of decomposition. There were also many portraits of people in the fullness of health. Some of these, with a few alterations,



"I just think it undermines our organization's fiery rhetoric when you close your Internet postings with a smiley face."

• •

could be passed off as anyone. As I recall, we used Generalissimo Franco as Haji Baba, the progressive astrologer. Trotsky had a role, too, I believe, as a slumlord brained by one of his own defective bathtubs. Woodrow Wilson was our horse handicapper, a role undertaken in real life by one of Fast Myron's cronies.

Identity was a protean and unstable element around the *Mirror*. An action shot combined with a grinning cadaver or terrified victim-to-be, plus a vehicle, a harness, or what have you, could all be spliced together by the genius of Natasha, into a form that told a very grim story indeed. Thus: "SKYDIVER DEVOURED BY STARVING BIRDS." And, lickety split, there it was; you could hear the clacking beaks, and the harrowing screams of the doomed sportsman, his features torn and bloody, his fingers clawed from the ropes by hunger-crazed kites and corbies, not four and twenty but thousands. And all this before the horrified upturned faces of the crowd!

At one point, some zany state attorney general, with nothing better to do than read scuzzy tabloids, inquired into one of our stories: "EXPLODING CIGAR KILLS NINE." The A.G. was ready to prosecute. We had to explain that, in our newspapers, just as names were changed to protect the innocent, so also were circumstances adjusted, and that the order of facts, or even the facts themselves, were conceived in such a way that no one should suffer embarrassment. After a moment, a light went on in his brain. In any case, the sale of the *National Mirror* was interdicted in his state, which, we had to remind him, contained no such town as Ding-a-Ling.

One day, in the elevator, I saw Alger Hiss. And it wasn't like thinking you'd seen Joe Hill; he was really there—a tall, professorial man in a faded brown fedora. He was carrying two dark leather bags that might have been sample cases. It was a stormy day. His hat brim was turned down, and the morning rain dripped onto the narrow shoulders of his raincoat. His stance was braced against the weight of the cases, which imposed on him a Willy Loman-like submissiveness; he was the very picture of reduction and humiliation. Still, I thought his face was marked with a certain irony—the curled bloodless lips, the arched eyebrow. So sacrificial a figure he appeared, so accepting of his suspension from grace, that he gave off a sort of darshan like the Christus in some Popular Front crucifixion by Philip Evergood. He and I were the only people in the elevator.

I wanted to spin around and say something. "I know you didn't do it, Mr. Hiss." Or perhaps, "I always knew you did it, Commie!" I could have asked him, "Did you do it, Mr. Hiss? You can tell me." Or requested an interview.

I did none of these things. For the rest of the day, I went around telling people that I'd seen Alger Hiss in the elevator. It proved a conversation stopper.

A few weeks before my tour of the corporate workplace ended—before I qualified for unemployment insurance again and could go back to my novel—I got hired away from the *National Mirror* by a rival tabloid, the *Inside News*. I have trouble believing that this represented any kind of professional recognition. However, two of us *Mirror* writers soon found ourselves working across town at a somewhat higher salary.

The atmosphere at the *Inside News* was different from that at the *Mirror*. Though the word fits uneasily, one might have called it more "authentic." The *Inside News* was not and did not attempt to appear to be part of a chain. Like the *Mirror*, it sold sex and grotesquerie, though its inclination was more toward show business and the rising celebrity culture. Its most distressing aspect, from the staff perspective, was that some of the stories behind the headlines were more or less true; that is, events related to the ones in the stories had actually occurred somewhere in the real world. The notion that what we were publishing reflected human behavior was disturbing.

Sometimes informants or aspiring paparazzi showed up at the office with tips or compromising photographs. Big Bob, the man who ran the *Inside News*, had once been notorious as the owner of a gossip magazine. He had figured in a few Hollywood libel suits, and on one occasion an outraged reader had gunned him down—real shotgun, real shot, real time. But, by the time I went to work for him, he was fading into relative obscurity and his A-list of showgirls, "profiles," and high-living gangsters was dissolving into the morning-after mist. Of Bob's media glory, it seemed that only this imitation tabloid remained, and I remember a wistful sense of reduced circumstances around the offices, which were in a former milliner's loft, a mere pistol shot from Bloomingdale's.

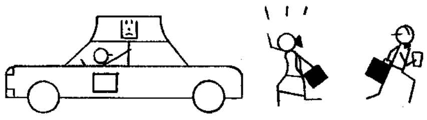
Bob himself had come to inhabit a ghost town peopled by the phantoms of the Great White Way. In his eyes, the most important man in town was Walter Winchell, to whose friendship and patronage he generously ascribed his own position. This was in the period not long before Winchell's death, when the Stork Club, W.W.'s column, big-time radio, and even the *Daily Mirror* were all things of the past. In Bob's book, though, Winchell was bigger than Norma Desmond, and nothing lay beyond his powers of good or evil.

For me—a reasonably educated person with pretensions to a higher calling, a husband, and a father of young children—working at the *Inside News* was, God knows, a moral humiliation as well as an intellectual one. But the fact was that the *Inside News*, with its overworked, underpaid staff of heads, hipsters, players, and urban frontiersmen, its doctored and disgusting photographs, its shameless lies, and its shameful authenticity, kept me in a state of unsound euphoria. It was the first job I ever held down where drugs were consumed during work hours—if you don't count the half pints of Gold Leaf Cognac that the *Daily News's* rewrite desk, where I had worked in the fifties, consumed between midnight and dawn. I was fascinated by the skewed mortuary glamour of Big Bob's operation, the Runyonesque shadows and flashes.

Bob often entertained a large, elegantly suited man who was known at the *Inside News* as Richie Construction, which was either a derivation of his name or his corporate identity. In any case, Richie also knew and admired Winchell; he had made himself invaluable to the great man many times, and had a vast store of "Walter stories." All Walter stories aimed at revealing more or less the same thing—namely, the obsessiveness of Winchell's desire for revenge, his readiness to injure anyone, no matter how pathetically powerless or well intentioned, in retaliation for the most ephemeral slight. Richie's explanation of the ineluctability of Winchell's vengeance was almost identical to his explanation of the origins of organized crime: "The smart people worked it out: somebody makes a mistake—they gotta pay." He'd recount this cheerless message with a sad shrug and a sigh. He had, Big Bob assured us, often appeared as the herald of smart people's displeasure.

The *Inside News* gave employment to the smart and the less so alike. With everyone imagining himself hip to the scene—and in debt to bookmakers, dope dealers, loan sharks, and even honest creditors—frictions developed that sometimes threatened to abrade or contuse. There was rather too much fraternization. Wives and girlfriends, husbands and boyfriends were always getting in trouble and being thrown out. Sometimes they would seek refuge with other couples, which only compounded everybody's misery.

One melancholy example of misunderstanding involved three friends of mine and brought to bear all the increasingly unstable elements of the era: racial tension, the sexual revolution, and feminist autonomy. Reduced to its common denominators, however, what happened was no more than the eternal down-low shit, timeless at its core. X., a staff writer for the *Inside News*, who rendered elegant, erudite, and delightfully ironic prose with a sophisticated African-American flavor, found himself temporarily unhoused. He was given refuge by Y. and Z., a husband and wife, respectively, both also employees of the *Inside News*. All at once, Y. found himself promoted to a new position as chief editor, and compelled to spend more and more time at the office. Big Bob may have planned this as a form of revenge (for something I didn't know about), with the depraved hope of an outcome in which, unattended, Z. and X. would drift into a romantic liaison. And so the outcome came out.



The story circulated as follows: One night, Y. arrives home to confront a scene of dishonor—X. and Z., unclad, in bed. Y. is a hot-tempered man, overweight but not unfit for strenuous activity and surprisingly fast over short distances. He happens to own a giant roofer's staple gun, good for shooting metal hooks to bind steel. And good, Y. decides, for shooting staples into X., in order to impress on him, or into him, Richie Construction's principle: you make a mistake, you gotta pay.

X. comprehends the gestalt. He is up and gone. Wisely, he does not pause to be stapled. Nor does he pause to dress. Wearing nothing but sharkskin loafers, he hurtles down the apartment building's stairs, pursued by Y., with the big staple gun shooting barbed horsehoes that blast two-foot plaster craters in the hallway walls. At the bottom, with Y. still flinging himself down the stairs behind him, X. has no choice but to flee through the winter streets. Y. gains on him as he loses a loafer on a turn.

There are few people out. It's very late. It's the Upper West Side—dog walkers and such folk. They have nothing to say to the frantic, half-tumescent young black man running toward them. People scream. Behind X. lurches a hyperventilating fat man, waving what looks like a machine gun. It's Y., somewhat out of condition from all those late-night deli sandwiches at his desk at the *Inside News*. The police, the old-style insensitive, unimaginative police, arrive. And there's more, but no matter. It was all unfortunate, and very mischievous of Big Bob.

The *Inside News* had a personal dimension, and one of its oddest homespun touches was the presence of Bob's two sisters, Edith and Helen. They were actually sisters—of Bob's and of each other—and though I would be hard put to render their job descriptions, I will never forget their voices. This is because their voices, reading every story aloud, were the standard vehicles of judgment at the *Inside News*.

Procedures here differed from those over at the *Mirror*. We composed some headlines, but we received assignments, too. An assignment might come from

Bob, from the sisters, or even from Richie Construction. Richie's assignments were tediously moralizing, and they always spun around the same basic plot: people make a mistake for which they gotta pay. Failing to recognize Winchell or some other button man and render deference was a common faux pas in Richie's fables. Richie did once give us a nice story about two drunk caporegimes having a live-crab-eating contest at the Fulton Fish Market, scooping the things right out of a barrel. This will suffice, I think, to illustrate why invented stories are so liberating and bright with possibility, while the true shit keeps you bound to a fallen world.

Bob himself liked one story of mine. It was invented, but in its perversity and cruelty it might as well have been true. It went like this: A man spends his life buying numbers tickets. Every day for fifty years he plays the bolita, blanks every time. One day—his birthday—he hits the big one. He calls his wife. She says, "Oh, come home before something happens!" He goes, "Ha! I'm gonna celebrate." Maybe he buys a beer at the corner. Maybe he goes to get a lap dance. He comes back out onto the street. He's giddy. Here comes a truck. *Splat!* What's this in his bloody hand? Unreadable. The winning bug gets swept into the sewer; the birthday boy goes to the morgue.

What Bob and Richie liked most was my headline: "HE'LL NEVER SPEND A DIME!" They went around repeating it for days. "Never spend a dime!" Losers couldn't win was the whole of the law to those guys.

The sisters had a similar attitude. Of course, their concerns were more feminine, more sensitive to the nuances of romance, the play of the errant heart. One day, Edith and Helen gave me an opportunity to prove myself on their court, which was, finally, where the big decisions were made. They did it, I guess, to see if I was a true player.

Few careers have identifiable low points. Shakespeare told us, "The worst is not so long as we can say, 'This is the worst.' " But this was bad. I was assigned a cover byline and a false identity. The best I can say of the project is that it was a kind of social investigative story, to the extent that invented stories of no consequence can be called "investigative." Anyway, it was an exposé, one where you pronounce the final "e."

My byline was Carmen Guitterez. I was—Carmen was—"a sexy Latin showgirl." The story was to be called "RUBIROSA WAS A FIZZLE IN MY BED!" Porfirio Rubirosa, as mercifully few will now remember, was a playboy, a friend or creation of Winchell's. Rubi, as his fellow trashy international socialites may have addressed him, served in the diplomatic corps of the Dominican Republic while that country was under the rule of the surreally sadistic General Leónidas Trujillo, who had once been his father-in-law. At his prime, Rubi was always in the columns, especially Winchell's. Press agents for the splashy clubs of the time—the Stork, the Copa, El Morocco—constantly reported his dancing the night away at their establishments, whirling a succession of heiresses and celebrities until dawn.

The subtext was his prowess as an indefatigable lover. People like Richie and Bob and the guys who ate live crabs at the Fulton Fish Market would discuss what they had heard were his techniques. One was to keep one hand up to the wrist in a champagne bucket full of ice in order to delay orgasm. (All over New York, parochial-school freshmen, Navy recruits, apprentices at the Metallic Lathers Union were filing that one away to use when they took Zsa Zsa to the Pierre and someone brought them an ice bucket.) Rubi's well-nigh mystical prolongations were the whisper current in every high-toned powder room, the very prospect of which cast beautiful women of every conceivable eminence at his feet. I, however, knew better! I, Carmen Guitterez, author of the *Inside News* expos-*ay*, was going to set the world straight!

Edith and Helen oversaw me as I rolled a blank sheet into my typewriter. I had never thought that it would come to this. "RUBIROSA," I typed sombrely, "WAS A FIZZLE IN MY BED! By Carmen Guitterez."

"Do you really think *fizzle*?" I asked Edith, who had written the headline for me. "Don't you think something else . . ."

" 'Fizzle'!" she told me. "I want 'fizzle'! 'Fizzle' says it!"

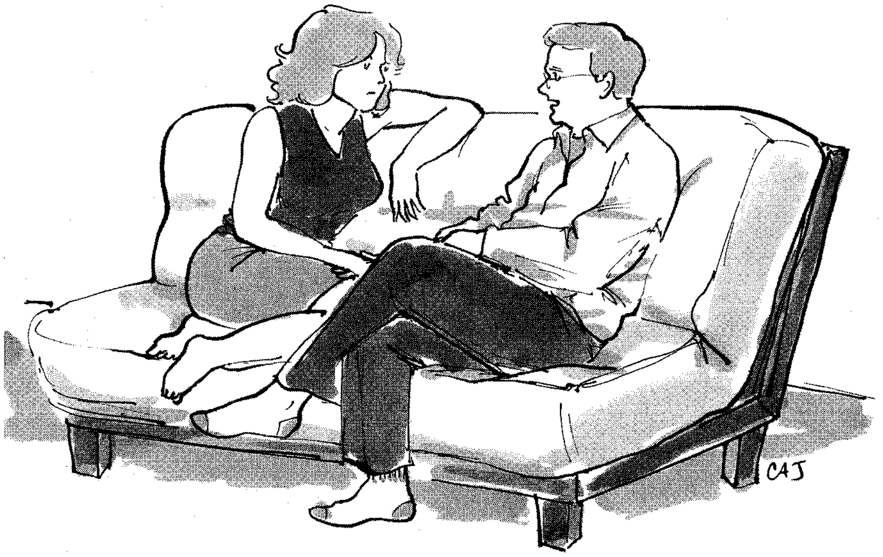
Fizzle, right.

I will pass over the writerly tropes I employed to breathe life into Carmen. Let's just say that she was a Latin bombshell. Irrepressible! Volatile! Enthusiastic! And fun! Oh, and when she got a load of Rubi, *ay, ay, ay!* Handsome? *Caramba!*

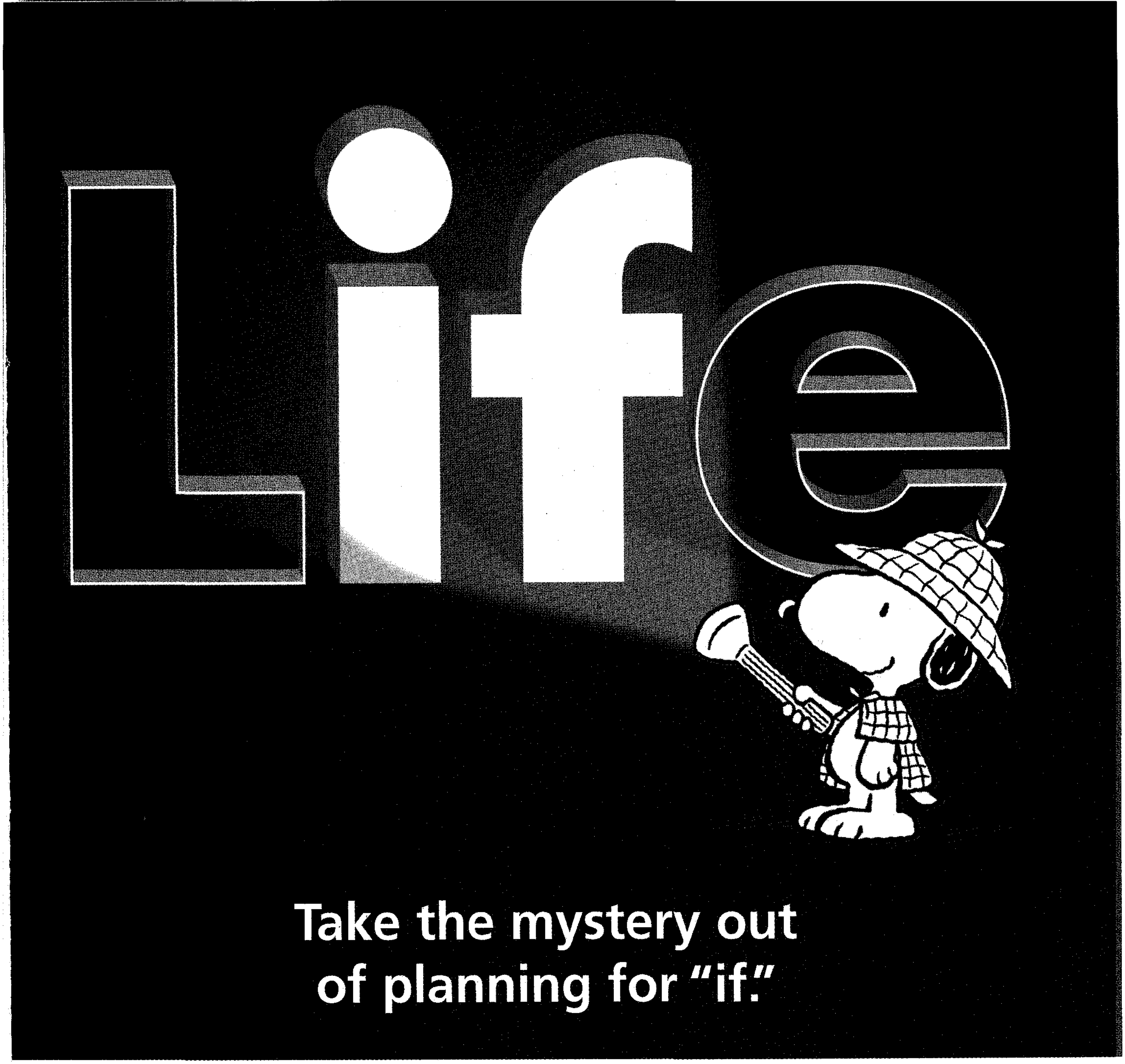
That's how Carmen was. An original.

There followed volleys of innuendo and cute euphemism to the effect of my—Carmen's—disillusionment. When my hand began to wither and my tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth, I handed the copy to Edith for the showdown.

Edith walked with a cane. She was stocky and blue-haired. She spent all her time at the end of a long table next to a pile of legal pads. I watched her eye the story. Everyone in the shop grew si-



"Am I having an affair? Why? Am I allowed?"



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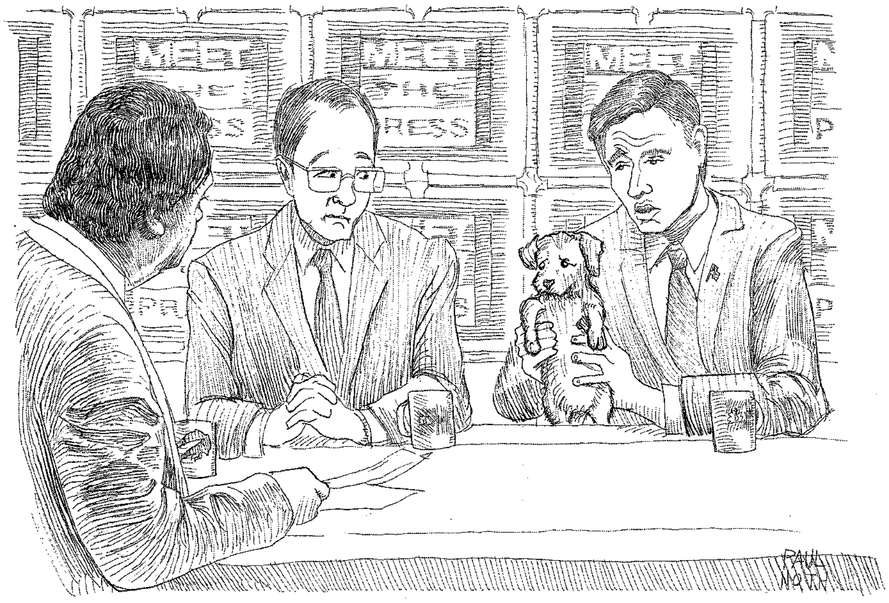

"You know, during these debates there's something that all too often gets ignored."

• •

lent. Then Edith threw back her head and gave voice.

She read the title in a voice of pleasant expectation. She carried on with the lead, in the same tone. She was beaming. So awallow in humiliation and self-pity was I that I failed to notice when, at a certain point in the narrative, her voice began to trail off. Her reading began to sound like a tape recorder with its battery running down. Or, as we used to say, a record at the wrong speed. She kept glancing up at me, as though I were out of my mind. This annoyed me, since it had hardly been my idea to pose as Carmen Guitterez, and express wry disappointment at the manhood of an elderly Dominican. Edith was shaking her head. Across the office, X., the thief of hearts, restored to his clothes and safe from Y.'s revenge, and Richie Construction were laughing at my annoyance.

After fixing me with a snakefish eye, Edith pretended to make an effort to read more. It seemed heavy going. She put a hand to her throat as though her vocal cords were seizing up. Then she gave up and simply stared at me.

"What's wrong?" I asked her. "I mean, that's what you asked for."

She exchanged a look with Helen and shook her head in silent, hopeless denial.

"Kid," she said. "Aw, kid."

"Kid" was what she called me, although I was practically thirty.

"What, for God's sake?"

"What?" she nearly shouted at me. "Put some *pizzazz* in it! That's what! Put some *pizzazz* in it."

I felt like Raskolnikov contemplating the value of Ivanova's life, the scant reasons for enduring the old woman's continued existence.

"All right," I said. "I'll run it through again."

I kept my eyes on the paper in the roller. *Clickety clack clack*, I went, hacking my way through another take on that idiotic, polo-playing, skirt-happy, impotent son of a bitch and his ditzy unsatisfied *muchacha*. Once again, I handed it to Edith. This time Sister Helen intercepted.

"Let me try it," she said. In a voice that was softer and more high-pitched than her sister's, she began to read aloud from my tale of Rubi and Carmen, star-crossed sensualists denied their full measure of *amor*. Whereas Edith's rendering had been world-weary and wry, Helen's had a tone of naïve sweetness. All the same, after a time she began to flag. She had started out full of merry brio and guileless clarity, as warmly confidential as the liver-pill salesman on the radio soap opera "The Romance of Helen Trent." But, all at once, her jaw seemed to thicken. The words dragged on without inflection. It seemed as if one sentence had no connection to another. Carmen's worldly insights were rendered in leaden, labored syllables. Finally, the reading stopped as though borne down by its own weight. Helen shook her head, trying to catch my eye.

"Kid, Jeesuz Christ. That ain't it!"

Big Bob spoke up from the raised desk where he presided. "Would yez tell him," he asked Helen, "to put some *pizzazz* in it?"

"This is what I'm telling him, Bob!" she said, then turned to me. "Kid," she said, "you gotta put some *pizzazz* in it."

Reimagining Rubi and Carmen, visualizing once more their scented love chamber, I wanted to make them die, just as surely as I wanted to make Helen and Edith and Big Bob and smirking Richie Construction die, howling in the land of Bosch's garden. How could I write of love, or even of unconsummated concupiscence, when all I knew was bitterness and rage? I was playing Cupid for these damn perverted defunct conceits, an organ-grinder's monkey with a typewriter. I was working for Big Bob and the *Inside News,* and I'd be doing it for the rest of my worthless dime-a-line life.

But I finished the stupid thing. Every phrase, I knew, was precisely what she wanted. I waited, trembling with anger, for her crone's voice to croon its fatuous approval. Writing the story was an act of self-immolation. I felt as though I had shoved my pen down my own throat. But it was as required.

Helen took the four pages and read through them. This time, she was silent. Her face betrayed no response. She passed the pages to her sister. Edith, also, curiously, read in silence. I watched them whisper together. I was finally openly interested.

And then they turned their matching senescent smiles on me. They shook their round balding heads in a unity of rejection.

Helen was the elder, I think; she leaned forward. "This is just filth," she said. ♦

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ANNALS OF ENTERTAINMENT

THE FORMULA

What if you built a machine to predict hit movies?

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

One sunny afternoon not long ago, Dick Copaken sat in a booth at Daniel, one of those hushed, exclusive restaurants on Manhattan's Upper East Side where the waiters glide spectrally from table to table. He was wearing a starched button-down shirt and a blue blazer. Every strand of his thinning hair was in place, and he spoke calmly and slowly, his large pink Charlie Brown head bobbing along evenly as he did. Copaken spent many years as a partner at the white-shoe Washington, D.C., firm Covington & Burling, and he has a lawyer's gravitas. One of his best friends calls him, admiringly, "relentless." He likes to tell stories. Yet he is not, strictly, a storyteller, because storytellers are people who know when to leave things out, and Copaken never leaves anything out: each detail is adduced, considered, and laid on the table—and then adjusted and readjusted so that the corners of the new fact are flush with the corners of the fact that preceded it. This is especially true when Copaken is talking about things that he really cares about, such as questions of international law or his grandchildren or, most of all, the movies.

Dick Copaken loves the movies. His friend Richard Light, a statistician at Harvard, remembers summer vacations on Cape Cod with the Copakens, when Copaken would take his children and the Light children to the movies every day. "Fourteen nights out of fourteen," Light said. "Dick would say at seven o'clock, 'Hey, who's up for the movies?' And, all by himself, he would take the six kids to the movies. The kids had the time of their lives. And Dick would come back and give, with a completely straight face, a rigorous analysis of how each movie was put together, and the direction and the special effects and the animation." This is a man who has seen two or three movies a week for the past fifty years, who has filed hundreds of plots and characters and scenes away in his mind, and at Daniel he was talking about a movie that touched him as much as any he'd ever seen.

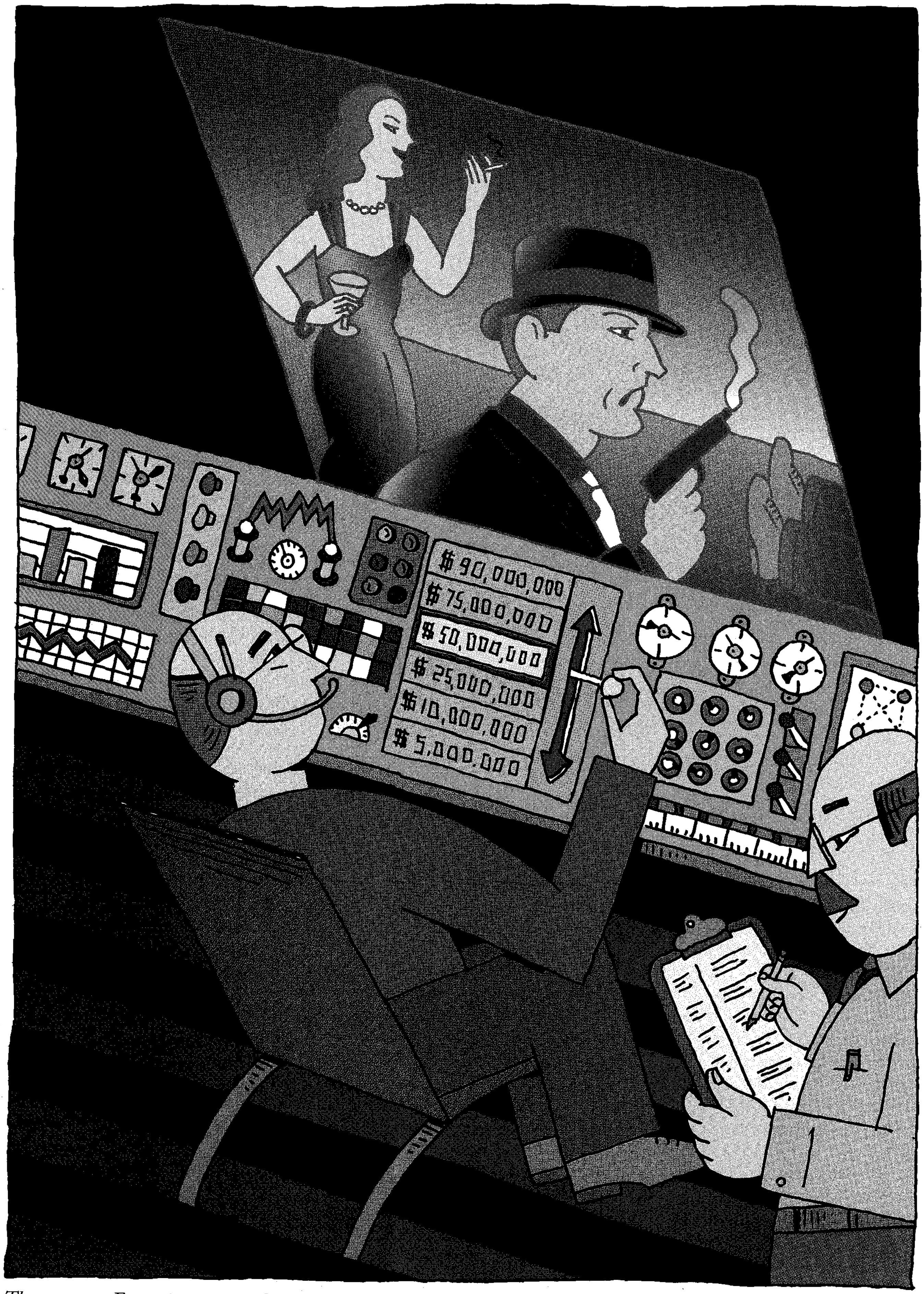
"Nobody's heard of it," he said, and he clearly regarded this fact as a minor tragedy. "It's called 'Dear Frankie.' I watched it on a Virgin Atlantic flight because it was the only movie they had that I hadn't already seen. I had very low expectations. But I was blown away." He began, in his lawyer-like manner, to lay out the plot. It takes place in Scotland. A woman has fled an abusive relationship with her infant son and is living in a port town. The boy, now nine, is deaf, and misses the father he has never known. His mother has told him that his father is a sailor on a ship that rarely comes to shore, and has suggested that he write his father letters. These she intercepts, and replies to, writing as if she were the father. One day, the boy finds out that what he thinks is his father's ship is coming to shore. The mother has to find a man to stand in for the father. She does. The two fall in love. Unexpectedly, the real father reëmerges. He's dying, and demands to see his son. The mother panics. Then the little boy reveals his secret: he knew about his mother's ruse all along.

"I was in tears over this movie," Copaken said. "You know, sometimes when you see a movie in the air you're in such an out-of-body mood that things get exaggerated. So when I got home I sat down and saw it another time. I was bawling again, even though I knew what was coming." Copaken shook his head, and then looked away. His cheeks were flushed. His voice was suddenly thick. There he was, a buttoned-down corporate lawyer, in a hushed restaurant where there is practically a sign on the wall forbidding displays of human emotion—and he was crying, a *third* time. "That absolutely hits me," he said, his face still turned away. "He knew all along what the mother was doing." He stopped to collect himself. "I can't even retell the damn story without getting emotional."

He tried to explain why he was crying. There was the little boy, first of all. He was just about the same age as Copaken's grandson Jacob. So maybe that was part of it. Perhaps, as well, he was reacting to the idea of an absent parent. His own parents, Albert and Silvia, ran a modest community-law practice in Kansas City, and would shut down their office whenever Copaken or his brother had any kind of school activity or performance. In the Copaken world, it was an iron law that parents had to be present. He told a story about representing the Marshall Islands in negotiations with the U.S. government during the Cold War. A missile-testing range on the island was considered to be strategically critical. The case was enormously complex—involving something like fifty federal agencies and five countries—and, just as the negotiations were scheduled to begin, Copaken learned of a conflict: his eldest daughter was performing the lead role in a sixth-grade production of "The Wiz." "I made an instant decision," Copaken said. He told the President of the Marshall Islands that his daughter had to come first. Half an hour passed. "I get a frantic call from the State Department, very high levels: 'Dick, I got a call from the President of the Marshall Islands. What's going on?' I told him. He said, 'Dick, are you putting in jeopardy the national security of the United States for a sixth-grade production?'" In the end, the negotiations were suspended while Copaken flew home from Hawaii. "The point is," Copaken said, "that absence at crucial moments has been a worry to me, and maybe this movie just grabbed at that issue."

He stopped, seemingly dissatisfied. Was that really why he'd cried? Hollywood is awash in stories of bad fathers and abandoned children, and Copaken doesn't cry in fancy restaurants every

SEYMOUR CHWAST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The mavens at Epagogix use a neural-network system to estimate a screenplay's box-office performance before it gets made.

"You were the one who wanted to colonize another planet."

time he thinks of one of them. When he tried to remember the last time he cried at the movies, he was stumped. So he must have been responding to something else, too—some detail, some unconscious emotional trigger in the combination of the mother and the boy and the Scottish seaside town and the ship and the hired surrogate and the dying father. To say that he cried at "Dear Frankie" because of that lonely fatherless boy was as inadequate as saying that people cried at the death of Princess Diana because she was a beautiful princess. Surely it mattered as well that she was killed in the company of her lover, a man distrusted by the Royal Family. Wasn't this "Romeo and Juliet"? And surely it mattered that she died in a tunnel, and that the tunnel was in Paris, and that she was chased by motorbikes, and that she was blond and her lover was dark—because each one of those additional narrative details has complicated emotional associations, and it is the subtle combination of all these associations that makes us laugh or choke up when we remember a certain movie, every single time, even when we're sitting in a fancy restaurant.

Of course, the optimal combination of all those elements is a mystery. That's why it's so hard to make a really memorable movie, and why we reward so richly the few people who can. But suppose you really, really loved the movies, and suppose you were a relentless type, and suppose you used all of the skills you'd learned during the course of your career at the highest rungs of the law to put together an international team of story experts. Do you think you could figure it out?

The most famous dictum about Hollywood belongs to the screenwriter William Goldman. "Nobody knows anything," Goldman wrote in "Adventures in the Screen Trade" a couple of decades ago. "Not one person in the entire motion picture field *knows* for a certainty what's going to work. Every time out it's a guess." One of the highest-grossing movies in history, "Raiders of the Lost Ark," was offered to every studio in Hollywood, Goldman writes, and every one of them turned it down except Paramount: "Why did Paramount say yes? Because nobody knows anything. And why did all the other studios say no? Because nobody knows anything. And why did Universal, the mightiest studio of all, pass on *Star Wars*? . . . Because nobody, *nobody*—not now, not ever—knows the least goddamn thing about what is or isn't going to work at the box office."

What Goldman was saying was a version of something that has long been argued about art: that there is no way of getting beyond one's own impressions to arrive at some larger, objective truth. There are no rules to art, only the infinite variety of subjective experience. "Beauty is no quality in things themselves," the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume wrote. "It exists merely in the mind which contemplates them; and each mind perceives a different beauty." Hume might as well have said that nobody knows anything.

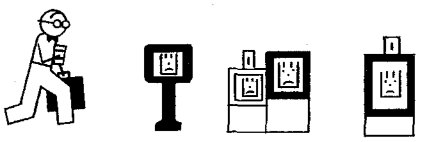
But Hume had a Scottish counterpart, Lord Kames, and Lord Kames was equally convinced that traits like beauty, sublimity, and grandeur were indeed reducible to a rational system of rules and precepts. He devised principles of congruity, propriety, and perspicuity: an elevated subject, for instance, must be expressed in elevated language; sound and signification should be in concordance; a woman was most attractive when in distress; depicted misfortunes must never occur by chance. He genuinely thought that the superiority of Virgil's hexameters to Horace's could be demonstrated with Euclidean precision, and for every Hume, it seems, there has always been a Kames—someone arguing that if nobody knows anything it is only because nobody's looking hard enough.

In a small New York loft, just below Union Square, for example, there is a tech startup called Platinum Blue that consults for companies in the music business. Record executives have tended to be Humean: though they can tell you how they feel when they listen to a song, they don't believe anyone can know with confidence whether a song is going to be a hit, and, historically, fewer than twenty per cent of the songs picked as hits by music executives have fulfilled those expectations. Platinum Blue thinks it can do better. It has a proprietary computer program that uses "spectral deconvolution software" to measure the mathematical relationships among all of a song's structural components: melody, harmony, beat, tempo, rhythm, octave, pitch, chord progression, cadence, sonic brilliance, frequency, and so on. On the basis of that analysis, the firm believes it can predict whether a song is likely to become a hit with eighty-per-cent accuracy. Platinum Blue is staunchly Kamesian, and, if you have a field dominated by those who say there are no rules, it is almost inevitable that someone will come along and say that there are. The head of Platinum Blue is a man named Mike McCready, and the service he is providing for the music business is an exact model of what Dick Copaken would like to do for the movie business.

McCready is in his thirties, baldish and laconic, with rectangular hipster glasses. His offices are in a large, open room, with a row of windows looking east, across the rooftops of downtown Manhattan. In the middle of the room is a conference table, and one morning recently McCready sat down and opened his laptop to demonstrate the Platinum Blue technology. On his screen was a cluster of thousands of white dots, resembling a cloud. This was a "map" of the songs his group had run through its software: each dot represented a single song, and each song was positioned in the cloud according to its particular mathematical signature. "You could have one piano sonata by Beethoven at this end and another one here," McCready said, pointing at the opposite end, "as long as they have completely different chord progressions and completely different melodic structures."

McCready then hit a button on his computer, which had the effect of eliminating all the songs that had not made the Billboard Top 30 in the past five years. The screen went from an undifferentiated cloud to sixty discrete clusters. This is what the universe of hit songs from the past five years looks like structurally; hits come out of a small, predictable, and highly conserved set of mathematical patterns. "We take a new CD far in advance of its release date," McCready said. "We analyze all twelve tracks. Then we overlay them on top of the already existing hit clusters, and what we can tell a record company is which of those songs conform to the mathematical pattern of past hits. Now, that doesn't mean that they *will* be hits. But what we are saying is that, almost certainly, songs that fall outside these clusters will not be hits—regardless of how much they sound and feel like hit songs, and regardless of how positive your call-out research or focus-group research is." Four years ago, when McCready was working with a similar version of the program at a firm in Barcelona, he ran thirty just-released albums, chosen at random, through his system. One stood out. The computer said that nine of the fourteen songs on the album had clear hit potential—which was unheard of. Nobody in his group knew much about the artist or had even listened to the record before, but the numbers said the album was going to be big, and McCready and his crew were of the belief that numbers do not lie. "Right around that time, a local newspaper came by and asked us what we were doing," McCready said. "We explained the hit-prediction thing, and that we were really turned on to a record by this artist called Norah Jones." The record was "Come Away with Me." It went on to sell twenty million copies and win eight Grammy awards.

The strength of McCready's analysis is its precision. This past spring, for instance, he analyzed "Crazy," by Gnarls Barkley. The computer calculated, first of all, the song's Hit Grade—that is, how close it was to the center of any of those sixty hit clusters. Its Hit Grade was 755, on a scale where anything above 700 is exceptional. The computer also found that "Crazy" belonged to the same hit cluster as Dido's "Thank You," James Blunt's "You're Beautiful," and Ashanti's "Baby," as well as older hits like "Let Me Be There," by Olivia Newton-John, and "One Sweet Day," by Mariah Carey, so that listeners who liked any of those songs would probably like "Crazy," too. Finally, the computer gave "Crazy" a Periodicity Grade—which refers to the fact that, at any given time, only twelve to fifteen hit clusters are "active," because from month to month the particular mathematical patterns that excite music listeners will shift around. "Crazy"'s periodicity score was 658—which suggested a very good fit with current tastes. The data said, in other words, that "Crazy" was almost certainly going to be huge—and, sure enough, it was.



If "Crazy" hadn't scored so high, though, the Platinum Blue people would have given the song's producers broad suggestions for fixing it. McCready said, "We can tell a producer, 'These are the elements that seem to be pushing your song into the hit cluster. These are the variables that are pulling your song away from the hit cluster. The problem seems to be in your bass line.' And the producer will make a bunch of mixes, where they do something different with the bass lines—increase the decibel level, or muddy it up. Then they come back to us. And we say, 'Whatever you were doing with mix No. 3, do a little bit more of that and you'll be back inside the hit cluster.' "

McCready stressed that his system didn't take the art out of hit-making. Someone still had to figure out what to do with mix No. 3, and it was entirely possible that whatever needed to be done to put the song in the hit cluster wouldn't work, because it would make the song sound wrong—and in order to be a hit a song had to *sound* right. Still, for the first time you wouldn't be guessing about what needed to be done. You would know. And what you needed to know in order to fix the song was much simpler than anyone would have thought. McCready didn't care about who the artist was, or the cleverness of the lyrics. He didn't even have a way of feeding lyrics into his computer. He cared only about a song's underlying mathematical structure. "If you go back to the popular melodies written by Beethoven and Mozart three hundred years ago," he went on, "they conform to the same mathematical patterns that we are looking at today. What sounded like a beautiful melody to them sounds like a beautiful melody to us. What has changed is simply that we have come up with new styles and new instruments. Our brains are wired in a way—we assume—that keeps us coming back, again and again, to the same answers, the same pleasure centers." He had sales data and Top 30 lists and deconvolution software, and it seemed to him that if you put them together you had an objective way of measuring something like beauty. "We think we've figured out how the brain works regarding musical taste," McCready said.

It requires a very particular kind of person, of course, to see the world as a code waiting to be broken. Hume once called Kames "the most arrogant man in the world," and to take this side of the argument you have to be. Kames was also a brilliant lawyer, and no doubt that matters as well, because to be a good lawyer is to be invested with a reverence for rules. (Hume defied his family's efforts to make him a lawyer.) And to think like Kames you probably have to be an outsider. Kames was born Henry Home, to a farming family, and grew up in the sparsely populated cropping-and-fishing county of Berwickshire; he became Lord Kames late in life, after he was elevated to the bench. (Hume was born and reared in Edinburgh.) His early published work was about law and its history, but he soon wandered into morality, religion, anthropology, soil chemistry, plant nutrition, and the physical sciences, and once asked his friend Benjamin Franklin to explain the movement of smoke in chimneys. Those who believe in the power of broad patterns and rules, rather than the authority of individuals or institutions, are not intimidated by the boundaries and hierarchies of knowledge. They don't defer to the superior expertise of insiders; they set up shop in a small loft somewhere downtown and take on the whole music industry at once. The difference between Hume and Kames is, finally, a difference in kind, not degree. You're either a Kamesian or you're not. And if you were to create an archetypal Kamesian—to combine lawyerliness, outsiderness, and supreme self-confidence in one dapper, Charlie Brown-headed combination? You'd end up with Dick Copaken.

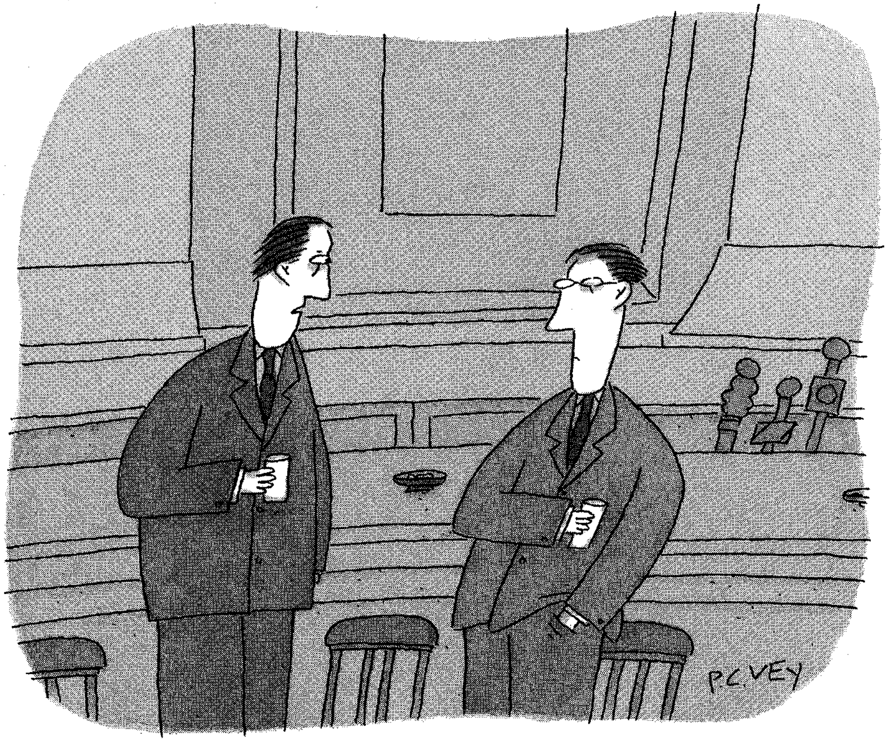
"I remember when I was a sophomore in high school and I went into the bathroom once to wash my hands," Copaken said. "I noticed the bubbles on the sink, and it fascinated me the way these bubbles would form and move around and float and re-form, and I sat there totally transfixed. My father called me, and I didn't hear him. Finally, he comes in. 'Son. What the . . . are you all right?' I said, 'Bubbles, Dad, look what they do.' He said, 'Son, if you're going to waste your time, waste it on something that may have some future consequence.' Well, I kind of rose to the challenge. That summer, I bicycled a couple of miles to a library in Kansas City and I spent every day reading every book and article I could find on bubbles."

"Whatever it is, he's been watching it all afternoon."

Bubbles looked completely random, but young Copaken wasn't convinced. He built a bubble-making device involving an aerator from a fish tank, and at school he pleaded with the math department to teach him the quadratic equations he needed to show why the bubbles formed the way they did. Then he devised an experiment, and ended up with a bronze medal at the International Science Fair. His interest in bubbles was genuine, but the truth is that almost anything could have caught Copaken's eye: pop songs, movies, the movement of chimney smoke. What drew him was not so much solving this particular problem as the general principle that problems were solvable—that he, little Dick Copaken from Kansas City, could climb on his bicycle and ride to the library and figure out something that his father thought wasn't worth figuring out.

Copaken has written a memoir of his experience defending the tiny Puerto Rican islands of Culebra and Vieques against the U.S. Navy, which had been using their beaches for target practice. It is a riveting story. Copaken takes on the vast Navy bureaucracy, armed only with arcane provisions of environmental law. He investigates the nesting grounds of the endangered hawksbill turtle, and the mating habits of a tiny yet extremely loud tree frog known as the coqui, and at one point he transports four frozen whale heads from the Bahamas to Harvard Medical School. Copaken wins. The Navy loses.

The memoir reads like a David-and-Goliath story. It isn't. David changed the rules on Goliath. He brought a slingshot to a sword fight. People like Copaken, though, don't change the rules; they believe in rules. Copaken would have agreed to sword-on-sword combat. But then he would have asked the referee for a stay, deposed Goliath and his team at great length, and papered him with brief after brief until he conceded that his weapon did not qualify as a sword under §48(B)(6)(e) of the Samaria Convention of 321 B.C. (The Philistines would have settled.) And whereas David knew that he couldn't win a conventional fight with Goliath, the conviction that sustained Copaken's long battle with the Navy was, to the contrary, that so long as the battle remained conventional—so long as it followed the familiar pathways of the law and of due process—he really could win. Dick Copaken didn't think he was an underdog at all. If you believe in rules, Goliath is just another Philistine, and the Navy is just another plaintiff. As for the ineffable mystery of the Hollywood blockbuster? Well, Mr. Goldman, you may not know anything. But I do.



"I feel like Doris is divorcing me for all the wrong reasons."

• •

Dick Copaken has a friend named Nick Meaney. They met on a case years ago. Meaney has thick dark hair. He is younger and much taller than Copaken, and seems to regard his friend with affectionate amusement. Meaney's background is in risk management, and for years he'd been wanting to bring the principles of that world to the movie business. In 2003, Meaney and Copaken were driving through the English countryside to Durham when Meaney told Copaken about a friend of his from college. The friend and his business partner were students of popular narrative: the sort who write essays for obscure journals serving the small band of people who think deeply about, say, the evolution of the pilot episode in transnational TV crime dramas. And, for some time, they had been developing a system for evaluating the commercial potential of stories. The two men, Meaney told Copaken, had broken down the elements of screenplay narrative into multiple categories, and then drawn on their encyclopedic knowledge of television and film to assign scripts a score in each of those categories—creating a giant screenplay report card. The system was extraordinarily elaborate. It was under constant refinement. It was also top secret. Henceforth, Copaken and Meaney would refer to the two men publicly only as "Mr. Pink" and "Mr. Brown," an homage to "Reservoir Dogs."

"The guy had a big wall, and he started putting up little Post-its covering everything you can think of," Copaken said. It was unclear whether he was talking about Mr. Pink or Mr. Brown or possibly some Obi-Wan Kenobi figure from whom Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown first learned their trade. "You know, the star wears a blue shirt. The star doesn't zip up his pants. Whatever. So he put all these factors up and began moving them around as the scripts were either successful or unsuccessful, and he began grouping them and eventually this evolved to a kind of ad-hoc analytical system. He had no theory as to what would work, he just wanted to know what did work."

Copaken and Meaney also shared a fascination with a powerful kind of computerized learning system called an artificial neural network. Neural networks are used for data mining—to look for patterns in very large amounts of data. In recent years, they have become a critical tool in many industries, and what Copaken and Meaney realized, when they thought about Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown, was that it might now be possible to bring neural networks to Hollywood. They could treat screenplays as mathematical propositions, using Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown's categories and scores as the motion-picture equivalents of melody, harmony, beat, tempo, rhythm, octave, pitch, chord progression, cadence, sonic brilliance, and frequency.

Copaken and Meaney brought in a former colleague of Meaney's named Sean Verity, and the three of them signed up Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown. They called their company Epagogix—a reference to Aristotle's discussion of epagogic, or inductive, learning—and they started with a "training set" of screenplays that Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown had graded. Copaken and Meaney won't disclose how many scripts were in the training set. But let's say it was two hundred. Those scores—along with the U.S. box-office receipts for each of the films made from those screenplays—were fed into a neural network built by a computer scientist of Meaney's acquaintance. "I can't tell you his name," Meaney said, "but he's English to his bootstraps." Mr. Bootstraps then went to work, trying to use Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown's scoring data to predict the box-office receipts of every movie in the training set. He started with the first film and had the neural network make a guess: maybe it said that the hero's moral crisis in act one, which rated a 7 on the 10-point moral-crisis scale, was worth $7 million, and having a gorgeous red-headed eighteen-year-old female lead

WELCOME TO IOWA
The Hawkeye State
PATTERSON

• •

whose characterization came in at 6.5 was worth $3 million and a 9-point bonding moment between the male lead and a four-year-old boy in act three was worth $2 million, and so on, putting a dollar figure on every grade on Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown's report card until the system came up with a prediction. Then it compared its guess with how that movie actually did. Was it close? Of course not. The neural network then went back and tried again. If it had guessed $20 million and the movie actually made $110 million, it would reweight the movie's Pink/Brown scores and run the numbers a second time. And then it would take the formula that worked best on Movie One and apply it to Movie Two, and tweak that until it had a formula that worked on Movies One and Two, and take that formula to Movie Three, and then to four and five, and on through all two hundred movies, whereupon it would go back through all the movies again, through hundreds of thousands of iterations, until it had worked out a formula that did the best possible job of predicting the financial success of every one of the movies in its database.

That formula, the theory goes, can then be applied to new scripts. If you were developing a $75-million buddy picture for Bruce Willis and Colin Farrell, Epagogix says, it can tell you, based on past experience, what that script's particular combination of narrative elements can be expected to make at the box office. If the formula says it's a $50-million script, you pull the plug. "We shoot turkeys," Meaney said. He had seen Mr. Bootstraps and the neural network in action: "It can sometimes go on for hours. If you look at the computer, you see lots of flashing numbers in a gigantic grid. It's like 'The Matrix.' There are a lot of computations. The guy is there, the whole time, looking at it. It eventually stops flashing, and it tells us what it thinks the American box-office will be. A number comes out."

The way the neural network thinks is not that different from the way a Hollywood executive thinks: if you pitch a movie to a studio, the executive uses an ad-hoc algorithm—perfected through years of trial and error—to put a value on all the components in the story. Neural networks, though, can handle problems that have a great many variables, and they never play favorites—which means (at least in theory) that as long as you can give the neural network the same range of information that a human decision-maker has, it ought to come out ahead. That's what the University of Arizona computer scientist Hsinchun Chen demonstrated ten years ago, when he built a neural network to predict winners at the dog track. Chen used the ten variables that greyhound experts told him they used in making their bets—like fastest time and winning percentage and results for the past seven races—and trained his system with the results of two hundred races. Then he went to the greyhound track in Tucson and challenged three dog-racing handicappers to a contest. Everyone picked winners in a hundred races, at a modest two dollars a bet. The experts lost $71.40, $61.20, and $70.20, respectively. Chen won $124.80. It wasn't close, and one of the main reasons was the special interest the neural network showed in something called "race grade": greyhounds are moved up and down through a number of divisions, according to their ability, and dogs have a big edge when they've just been bumped down a level and a big handicap when they've just been bumped up. "The experts know race grade exists, but they don't weight it sufficiently," Chen said. "They are all looking at win percentage, place percentage, or thinking about the dogs' times."

Copaken and Meaney figured that Hollywood's experts also had biases and skipped over things that really mattered. If a neural network won at the track, why not Hollywood? "One of the most powerful aspects of what we do is the ruthless objectivity of our system," Copaken said. "It doesn't care about maintaining relationships with stars or agents or getting invited to someone's party. It doesn't care about climbing the corporate ladder. It has one master and one master only: how do you get to bigger box-office? Nobody else in Hollywood is like that."

In the summer of 2003, Copaken approached Josh Berger, a senior executive at Warner Bros. in Europe. Meaney was opposed to the idea: in his mind, it was too early. "I just screamed at Dick," he said. But Copaken was adamant. He had Mr. Bootstraps, Mr. Pink, and Mr. Brown run sixteen television pilots through the neural network, and try to predict the size of each show's eventual audience. "I told Josh, 'Stick this in a drawer, and I'll come back at the end of the season and we can check to see how we did,' " Copaken said. In January of 2004, Copaken tabulated the results. In six cases, Epagogix guessed the number of American homes that would tune in to a show to within .06 per cent. In thirteen of the sixteen cases, its predictions were within two per cent. Berger was floored. "It was incredible," he recalls. "It was like someone saying to you, 'We're going to show you how to count cards in Vegas.' It had that sort of quality."

Copaken then approached another Hollywood studio. He was given nine unreleased movies to analyze. Mr. Pink, Mr. Brown, and Mr. Bootstraps worked only from the script—without reference to the stars or the director or the marketing budget or the producer. On three of the films—two of which were low-budget—the Epagogix estimates were way off. On the remaining six—including two of the studio's biggest-budget productions—they correctly identified whether the film would make or lose money. On one film, the studio thought it had a picture that would make a good deal more than $100 million. Epagogix said $49 million. The movie made less than $40 million. On another, a big-budget picture, the team's estimate came within $1.2 million of the final gross. On a number of films, they were surprisingly close. "They were basically within a few million," a senior executive at the studio said. "It was shocking. It was kind of weird." Had the studio used Epagogix on those nine scripts before filming started, it could have saved tens of millions of dollars. "I was impressed by a couple of things," another executive at the same studio said. "I was impressed by the things they thought mattered to a movie. They weren't the things that we typically give credit to. They cared about the venue, and whether it was a love story, and very specific things about the plot that they were convinced determined the outcome more than anything else. It felt very objective. And they could care less about whether the lead was Tom Cruise or Tom Jones."

The Epagogix team knocked on other doors that weren't quite so welcoming. This was the problem with being a Kamesian. Your belief in a rule-bound universe was what gave you, an outsider, a claim to real expertise. But you were still an outsider. You were still Dick Copaken, the blue-blazered corporate lawyer who majored in bubbles as a little boy in Kansas City, and a couple of guys from the risk-management business, and three men called Pink, Brown, and Bootstraps—and none of you had ever made a movie in your life. And what were you saying? That stars didn't matter, that the director didn't matter, and that all that mattered was story—and, by the way, that you understood story the way the people on the inside, people who had spent a lifetime in the motion-picture business, didn't. "They called, and they said they had a way of predicting box-office success or failure, which is everyone's fantasy," one former studio chief recalled. "I said to them, 'I hope you're right.' " The executive seemed to think of the Epagogix team as a small band of Martians who had somehow slipped their U.F.O. past security. "In reality, there are so many circumstances that can affect a movie's success," the executive went on. "Maybe the actor or actress has an external problem. Or this great actor, for whatever reason, just fails. You have to fire a director. Or September 11th or some other thing happens. There are many people who have come forward saying they have a way of predicting box-office success, but so far nobody has been able to do it. I think we know *something*. We just don't know enough. I still believe in something called that magical thing—talent, the unexpected. The movie god has to shine on you." You were either a Kamesian or you weren't, and this person wasn't: "My first reaction to those guys? Bullshit."

A few months ago, Dick Copaken agreed to lift the cloud of unknowing surrounding Epagogix, at least in part. He laid down three conditions: the meeting was to be in London, Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown would continue to be known only as Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown, and no mention was to be made of the team's current projects. After much discussion, an agreement was reached. Epagogix would analyze the 2005 movie "The Interpreter," which was directed by Sydney Pollack and starred Sean Penn and Nicole Kidman. "The Interpreter" had a complicated history, having gone through countless revisions, and there was a feeling that it could have done much better at the box office. If ever there was an ideal case study for the alleged wizardry of Epagogix, this was it.

The first draft of the movie was written by Charles Randolph, a philosophy professor turned screenwriter. It opened in the fictional African country of Matobo. Two men in a Land Rover pull up to a soccer stadium. A group of children lead them to a room inside the building. On the ground is a row of corpses.

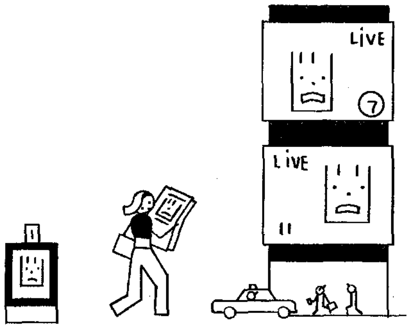
Cut to the United Nations, where we meet Silvia Broome, a young woman who works as an interpreter. She goes to the

U.N. Security Service and relates a terrifying story. The previous night, while working late in the interpreter's booth, she overheard two people plotting the assassination of Matobo's murderous dictator, Edmund Zuwanie, who is coming to New York to address the General Assembly. She says that the plotters saw her, and that her life may be in danger. The officer assigned to her case, Tobin Keller, is skeptical, particularly when he learns that she, too, is from Matobo, and that her parents were killed in the country's civil war. But after Broome suffers a series of threatening incidents Keller starts to believe her. His job is to protect Zuwanie, but he now feels moved to act as Broome's bodyguard as well. A quiet, slightly ambiguous romantic attraction begins to develop between them. Zuwanie's visit draws closer. Broome's job is to be his interpreter. On the day of the speech, Broome ends up in the greenroom with Zuwanie. Keller suddenly realizes the truth: that she has made up the whole story as a way of bringing Zuwanie to justice. He rushes to the greenroom. Broome, it seems, has poisoned Zuwanie and is withholding the antidote unless he goes onstage and confesses to the murder of his countrymen. He does. Broome escapes. A doctor takes a look at the poison. It's harmless. The doctor turns to the dictator, who has just been tricked into writing his own prison sentence: "You were never in danger, Mr. Zuwanie."

Randolph says that the film he was thinking of while he was writing "The Interpreter" was Francis Ford Coppola's classic "The Conversation." He wanted to make a spare, stark movie about an isolated figure. "She's a terrorist," Randolph said of Silvia Broome. "She comes to this country to do a very specific task, and when that task is done she's gone again. I wanted to write about this idea of a noble terrorist, who tried to achieve her ends with a character assassination, not a real assassination." Randolph realized that most moviegoers—and most Hollywood executives—prefer characters who have psychological motivations. But he wasn't trying to make "Die Hard." "Look, I'm the son of a preacher," he said. "I believe that ideology motivates people."

In 2004, Sydney Pollack signed on to direct the project. He loved the idea of an interpreter at the United Nations and the conceit of an overheard conversation. But he wanted to make a commercial movie, and parts of the script didn't feel right to him. He didn't like the twist at the end, for instance. "I felt like I had been tricked, because in fact there was no threat," Pollack said. "As much as I liked the original script, I felt like an audience would somehow, at the end, feel cheated." Pollack also felt that audiences would want much more from Silvia Broome's relationship with Tobin Keller. "I've never been able to do a movie without a love story in it," he said. "For me, the heart of it is always the man and the woman and who they are and what they are going through." Pollack brought Randolph back for rewrites. He then hired Scott Frank and Steven Zaillian, two of the most highly sought-after screenwriters in Hollywood—and after several months the story was turned inside out. Now Broome didn't tell the story of overhearing that conversation. It actually happened. She wasn't a terrorist anymore. She was a victim. She wasn't an isolated figure. She was given a social life. She wasn't manipulating Keller. Their relationship was more prominent. A series of new characters—political allies and opponents of Zuwanie's—were added, as was a scene in Brooklyn where a bus explodes, almost killing Broome. "I remember when I came on 'Minority Report,' and started over," said Frank, who wrote many of the new scenes for "The Interpreter." "There weren't many characters. When I finished, there were two mysteries and a hundred characters. I have diarrhea of the plot. This movie cried out for that. There are never enough suspects and red herrings."

The lingering problem, though, was the ending. If Broome wasn't after Zuwanie, who was? "We struggled," Pollack said. "It was a long process, to the point where we almost gave up." In the end, Zuwanie was made the engineer of the plot: he fakes the attempt on his life in order to justify his attacks on his enemies back home. Zuwanie hires a man to shoot him, and then another of Zuwanie's men shoots the assassin before he can do the job—and in the chaos Broome ends up with a gun in her hand, training it on Zuwanie. "The end was the hardest part," Frank said. "All these balls were in the air. But I couldn't find a satisfying way to resolve it. We had to put a gun in the hand of a pacifist. I couldn't quite sew it up in the right way. Sydney kept saying, 'You're so close.' But I kept saying, 'Yeah, but I don't believe what I'm writing.' I wonder if I did a disservice to 'The Interpreter.' I don't know that I made it better. I may have just made it different."



This, then, was the question for Epagogix: If Pollack's goal was to make "The Interpreter" a more commercial movie, how well did he succeed? And could he have done better?

The debriefing took place in central London, behind the glass walls of the private dining room of a Mayfair restaurant. The waiters came in waves, murmuring their announcements of the latest arrival from the kitchen. The table was round. Copaken, dapper as always in his navy blazer, sat next to Sean Verity, followed by Meaney, Mr. Brown, and Mr. Pink. Mr. Brown was very tall, and seemed to have a northern English accent. Mr. Pink was slender and graying, and had an air of authority about him. His academic training was in biochemistry. He said he thought that, in the highly emotional business of Hollywood, having a scientific background was quite useful. There was no sign of Mr. Bootstraps.

Mr. Pink began by explaining the origins of their system. "There were certain historical events that allowed us to go back and test how appealing one film was against another," he said. "The very simple one is that in the English market, in the sixties on Sunday night, religious programming aired on the major networks. Nobody watched it. And, as soon as that finished, movies came on. There were no lead-ins, and only two competing channels. Plus, across the country you had a situation where the commercial sector was playing a whole variety of movies against the standard, the BBC. It might be a John Wayne movie in Yorkshire, and a musical in Somerset, and the BBC would be the same movie everywhere. So you had a

ON READING A NEWSPAPER FOR THE FIRST TIME AS AN ADULT

By evening, I am down to the last,
almost weightless, mineral-odored
pages of the morning paper, and as I am
letting fall what I have read,
and creasing what's left lengthwise, the crackly
rustle and the feathery grease remind me that
what I am doing is what my then husband
did, that sitting waltz with the paper,
undressing its layers, blowing it,
opening and closing its delicate bellows,
folding till only a single column is un-
taken in, a bone of print then
gnawed from the top down, until the
layers of the paper-wasp nest lay around him by the
couch in a grayish speckled dishevel.
I left him to it,
the closest I wanted to get to the news was to
start to sleep with him, slowly, while he was
reading, the clouds of printed words
gradually becoming bedsheets around us.
When he left me, I thought *If only I had read*
the paper, and vowed, *In four years,*
I will have the Times delivered, so here
I am, leaning back on the couch, in the smell of ink's
oil, its molecules like little
ammonites suspended in shale,
lead's dust silvering me.
I have a finger, now, in the pie—
count me as a reader of the earth's gossip.
I weep to feel how I love to be like
my guy. I taste what he tastes each morning
without moving my lips.

—*Sharon Olds*

control. It was very pure and very simple. That was a unique opportunity to try and make some guesstimates as to why movies were doing what they were doing."

Brown nodded. "We built a body of evidence until we had something systematic," he said.

Pink estimated that they had analyzed thousands of movies. "The thing is that not everything comes to you as a script. For a long period, we worked for a broadcaster who used to send us a couple of paragraphs. We made our predictions based on that much. Having the script is actually too much information sometimes. You're trying to replicate what the audience is doing. They're trying to make a choice between three movies, and all they have at that point is whatever they've seen in *TV Guide* or on any trailer they've seen. We have to take a piece here and a piece here. Take a couple of reference points. When I look at a story, there are certain things I'm looking for—certain themes, and characters you immediately focus on." He thought for a moment. "That's not to deny that it matters whether the lead character wears a hat," he added, in a way that suggested he and Mr. Brown had actually thought long and hard about leads and hats.

"There's always a pattern," he went on. "There are certain stories that come back, time and time again, and that always work. You know, whenever we go into a market—and we work in fifty markets—the initial thing people say is 'What do you know about our market?' The assumption is that, say, Japan is different from us—that there has to be something else going on there. But, basically, they're just like us. It's the consistency of these reappearing things that I find amazing."

"Biblical stories are a classic case," Mr. Brown put in. "There is something about what they're telling and the message that's coming out that seems to be so universal. With Mel Gibson's 'The Passion,' people always say, 'Who could have predicted that?' And the answer is, we could have."

They had looked at "The Interpreter" scripts a few weeks earlier. The process typically takes them a day. They read, they graded, and then they compared notes, because Mr. Pink was the sort who went for "Yojimbo" and Mr. Brown's favorite movie was "Alien" (the first one), so they didn't always agree. Mr. Brown couldn't remember a single script he'd read where he thought there wasn't room for improvement, and Mr. Pink, when asked the same question, could come up with just one: "Lethal Weapon." "A friend of mine gave me the shooting script before it came out, and I remember reading it and thinking, It's all there. It was all on the page." Once Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown had scored "The Interpreter," they gave their analyses to Mr. Bootstraps, who did fifteen runs through the neural network: the original Randolph script, the shooting script, and certain variants of the plot that Epagogix devised. Mr. Bootstraps then passed his results to Copaken, who wrote them up. The Epagogix reports are always written by Copaken, and they are models of lawyerly thoroughness. This one ran to thirty-eight pages. He had finished the final draft the night before, very late. He looked fresh as a daisy.

Mr. Pink started with the original script. "My pure reaction? I found it very difficult to read. I got confused. I had to reread bits. We do this a lot. If a project takes more than an hour to read, then there's something going on that I'm not terribly keen on."

"It didn't feel to me like a mass-appeal movie," Mr. Brown added. "It seemed more niche."

When Mr. Bootstraps ran Randolph's original draft through the neural network, the computer called it a $33-million movie—an "intelligent" thriller, in the same commercial range as "The Constant

Gardener" or "Out of Sight." According to the formula, the final shooting script was a $69-million picture (an estimate that came within $4 million of the actual box-office). Mr. Brown wasn't surprised. The shooting script, he said, "felt more like an American movie, where the first one seemed European in style."

Everyone agreed, though, that Pollack could have done much better. There was, first of all, the matter of the United Nations. "They had a unique opportunity to get inside the building," Mr. Pink said. "But I came away thinking that it could have been set in any boxy office tower in Manhattan. An opportunity was missed. That's when we get irritated—when there are opportunities that could very easily be turned into something that would actually have had an impact."

"Locale is an extra character," Mr. Brown said. "But in this case it's a very bland character that didn't really help."

In the Epagogix secret formula, it seemed, locale matters a great deal. "You know, there's a big difference between city and countryside," Mr. Pink said. "It can have a huge effect on a movie's ability to draw in viewers. And writers just do not take advantage of it. We have a certain set of values that we attach to certain places."

Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown ticked off the movies and television shows that they thought understood the importance of locale: "Crimson Tide," "Lawrence of Arabia," "Lost," "Survivor," "Castaway," "Deliverance." Mr. Pink said, "The desert island is something that we have always recognized as a pungent backdrop, but it's not used that often. In the same way, prisons can be a powerful environment, because they are so well defined." The U.N. could have been like that, but it wasn't. Then there was the problem of starting, as both scripts did, in Africa—and not just Africa but a fictional country in Africa. The whole team found that crazy. "Audiences are pretty parochial, by and large," Mr. Pink said. "If you start off by telling them, 'We're going to begin this movie in Africa,' you're going to lose them. They've bought their tickets. But when they come out they're going to say, 'It was all right. But it was Africa.'" The whole thing seemed to leave Mr. Pink quite distressed. He looked at Mr. Brown beseechingly.

"You're breaking up, Gretchen!"

Mr. Brown changed the subject. "It's amazing how often quite little things, quite small aspects, can spoil everything," he said. "I remember seeing the trailer for 'V for Vendetta' and deciding against it right there, for one very simple reason: there was a ridiculous mask on the main character. If you can't see the face of the character, you can't tell what that person is thinking. You can't tell who they are. With 'Spider-Man' and 'Superman,' though, you do see the face, so you respond to them."

The team once gave a studio a script analysis in which almost everything they suggested was, in Hollywood terms, small. They wanted the lead to jump off the page a little more. They wanted the lead to have a young sidekick—a relatively minor character—to connect with a younger demographic, and they wanted the city where the film was set to be much more of a presence. The neural network put the potential value of better characterization at an extra $2.46 million in U.S. box-office revenue; the value of locale adjustment at $4.92 million; the value of a sidekick at $12.3 million—and the value of all three together (given the resulting synergies) at $24.6 million. That's another $25 million for a few weeks of rewrites and maybe a day or two of extra filming. Mr. Bootstraps, incidentally, ran the numbers and concluded that the script would make $47 million if the suggested changes were not made. The changes were not made. The movie made $50 million.

Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown went on to discuss the second "Interpreter" screenplay, the shooting script. They thought the ending was implausible. Charles Randolph had originally suggested that the Tobin Keller character be black, not white, in order to create the frisson of bringing together a white African and a black American. Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown independently came to the same conclusion. Apparently, the neural network ran the numbers on movies that paired black and white leads—"Lethal Weapon," "The Crying Game," "Independence Day," "Men in Black," "Die Another Day," "The Pelican Brief"—and found that the black-white combination could increase box-office revenue. The computer did the same kind of analysis on Scott Frank's "diarrhea of the plot," and found that there were too many villains. And if Silvia Broome was going to be in danger, Mr. Bootstraps made clear, she really had to be in danger.

"Our feeling—and Dick, you may have to jump in here—is that the notion of a woman in peril is a very powerful narrative element," Mr. Pink said. He glanced apprehensively at Copaken, evidently concerned that what he was about to say might fall in the sensitive category of the proprietary. "How powerful?" He chose his words carefully. "Well above average. And the problem is that we lack a sense of how much danger she is in, so an opportunity is missed. There were times when you were thinking, Is this something she has created herself? Is someone actually after her? You are confused. There is an element of doubt, and that ambiguity makes it possible to doubt the danger of the situation." Of course, all that ambiguity was there because in the Randolph script she was making it all up, and we were supposed to doubt the danger of the situation. But Mr. Pink and Mr. Brown believed that, once you decided you weren't going to make a European-style niche movie, you had to abandon ambiguity altogether.

"You've got to make the peril real," Mr. Pink said.

The Epagogix revise of "The Interpreter" starts with an upbeat Silvia Broome walking into the United Nations, flirting with the security guard. The two men plotting the assassination later see her and chase her through the labyrinthine corridors of what could only be the U.N. building. The ambiguous threats to Broome's life are now explicit. At one point in the Epagogix version, a villain pushes Broome's Vespa off one of Manhattan's iconic East River bridges. She hangs on to her motorbike for dear life, as it swings precariously over the edge of the parapet. Tobin Keller, in a police helicopter, swoops into view: "As she clings to Tobin's muscular body while the two of them are hoisted up into the hovering helicopter, we sense that she is feeling more than relief." In the Epagogix ending, Broome stabs one of Zuwanie's security men with a knife. Zuwanie storms off the stage, holds a press conference, and is shot dead by a friend of Broome's brother. Broome cradles the dying man in her arms. He "dies peacefully," with "a smile on his blood-spattered face." Then she gets appointed Matobo's U.N. ambassador. She turns to Keller. "'This time,' she notes with a wry smile . . . 'you will have to protect me.'" Bootstraps's verdict was that this version would result in a U.S. box-office of $111 million.

"It's funny," Mr. Pink said. "This past weekend, 'The Bodyguard' was on TV. Remember that piece of"—he winced—"entertainment? Which is about a bodyguard and a woman. The final scene is that they are right back together. It is very clearly and deliberately sown. That is the commercial way, if you want more bodies in the seats."

"You have to either consummate it or allow for the possibility of that," Copaken agreed.

They were thinking now of what would happen if they abandoned all fealty to the original, and simply pushed the movie's premise as far as they could possibly go.

Mr. Pink went on, "If Dick had said, 'You can take this project wherever you want,' we probably would have ended up with something a lot closer to 'The Bodyguard'—where you have a much more romantic film, a much more powerful focus to the two characters—without all the political stuff going on in the background. You go for the emotions on a very basic level. What would be the upper limit on that? You know, the upper limit of anything these days is probably still 'Titanic.' I'm not saying we could do six hundred million dollars. But it could be two hundred million."

It was clear that the whole conversation was beginning to make Mr. Pink uncomfortable. He didn't like "The Bodyguard." Even the title made him wince. He was the sort who liked "Yojimbo," after all. The question went around the room: What would you do with "The Interpreter"? Sean Verity wanted to juice up the action-adventure elements and push it to the $150- to $160-million range. Meaney wanted to do without expensive stars: he didn't think they were worth the money. Copaken wanted more violence, and he also favored making Keller black. But he didn't want to go all the way to "The Bodyguard," either. This was a man who loved "Dear Frankie" as much as any film he'd seen in recent memory, and "Dear Frankie" had a domestic box-office gross of $1.3 million. If you followed the rules of Epagogix, there wouldn't be any movies like "Dear Frankie." The neural network had one master, the market, and answered one question: how do you get to bigger box-office? But once a movie had made you vulnerable—once you couldn't even retell the damn story without getting emotional—you couldn't be content with just one master anymore.

That was the thing about the formula: it didn't make the task of filmmaking easier. It made it harder. So long as nobody knows anything, you've got license to do whatever you want. You can start a movie in Africa. You can have male and female leads not go off together—all in the name of making something new. Once you came to think that you knew something, though, you had to decide just how much money you were willing to risk for your vision. Did the Epagogix team know what the answer to that question was? Of course not. That question required imagination, and they weren't in the imagination business. They were technicians with tools: computer programs and analytical systems and proprietary software that calculated mathematical relationships among a laundry list of structural variables. At Platinum Blue, Mike McCready could tell you that the bass line was pushing your song out of the center of hit cluster 31. But he couldn't tell you exactly how to fix the bass line, and he couldn't guarantee that the redone version would still sound like a hit, and you didn't see him releasing his own album of computer-validated pop music. A Kamesian had only to read Lord Kames to appreciate the distinction. The most arrogant man in the world was a terrible writer: clunky, dense, prolix. He knew the rules of art. But that didn't make him an artist.

Mr. Brown spoke last. "I don't think it needs to be a big-budget picture," he said. "I think we do what we can with the original script to make it a strong story, with an ending that is memorable, and then do a slow release. A low-budget picture. One that builds through word of mouth—something like that." He was confident that he had the means to turn a $69-million script into a $111-million movie, and then again into a $150- to $200-million blockbuster. But it had been a long afternoon, and part of him had a stubborn attachment to "The Interpreter" in something like its original form. Mr. Bootstraps might have disagreed. But Mr. Bootstraps was nowhere to be seen. ♦

PROFILES

HE KNEW HE WAS RIGHT

How a former socialist became the Iraq war's fiercest defender.

BY IAN PARKER

Until not long ago, Christopher Hitchens, the British-born journalist, was a valued asset of the American left: an intellectual willing to show his teeth in the cause of righteousness. Today, Hitchens supports the Iraq war and is contemptuous of those who do not—a turn that has confused and dismayed former comrades, and brought him into odd new alliances. But his life looks much the same. He still writes a great deal, at a speed at which most people read. And, at fifty-seven, he still has an arrest-photograph air about him—looking like someone who, with as much dignity as possible, has smoothed his hair and straightened his collar after knocking the helmet off a policeman.

At a dinner a few months ago in San Francisco with his wife, Carol Blue, and some others, Hitchens wore a pale jacket and a shirt unbuttoned far enough to hint at what one ex-girlfriend has called "the pelt of the Hitch." Hitchens, who only recently gave up the habit of smoking in the shower, was working through a pack of cigarettes while talking to two women at his end of the table: a Stanford doctor in her early thirties whom he'd met once before, and a friend of hers, a librarian. He spoke with wit and eloquence about Iranian politics and what he saw as the unnecessary handsomeness of Gavin Newsom, the mayor of San Francisco.

Hitchens writes on politics and literature; and in both lines of work he tends to start from textual readings of a subtle and suspicious-minded kind. When he is not writing, he talks in the same measured, ironic voice as his prose, with the same fluency and intellectual momentum, as if he were troubled by the thought that he might never find another audience. Hitchens likes to have his say: he takes his arguments to the cable-news channels, to West Point cadets, to panel discussions in windowless hotel conference rooms. He stays at public meetings until the crowd—dehydrated and faint—has no more questions to ask, and then he gives out his e-mail address. He is a fine, funny orator, with the mock-heroic manner of an English barrister sure of his ground ("by all means," "if you will"), using derision, a grand diction, and looping subclauses that always carry him back to the main path. He also has the politician's trick of eliding the last word of one sentence to the first of the next, while stressing both words, in order to close a gate against interruption. In more private settings, the rhetoric is the same—except that there are filthy jokes drawn out to twenty minutes, and longer quotations from his vast stock of remembered English poetry. He seems to be perpetually auditioning for the role of best man. Ian McEwan, the novelist, recently said of Hitchens, "It all seems instantly, neurologically available: everything he's ever read, everyone he's ever met, every story he's ever heard."

In the noisy front room of the North Beach restaurant where the friends had met, Hitchens made a toast: "To the Constitution of the United States, and confusion to its enemies!" The conversation was amiable and boozy; Hitchens might be said to care more for history than for individual humans, but he was in an easy mood, after a drive, in beautiful early-evening light, from Menlo Park. (He and Blue, a writer working on a novel, live with their thirteen-year-old daughter in Washington, D.C., but spend the summer in California, where her parents live.) During the ride, he had discussed with the Pakistani-born taxi-driver the virtues and vices of Benazir Bhutto, while surreptitiously using a bottle of Evian to put out a small but smoky fire that he had set in the ashtray.

And then the young doctor to his left made a passing but sympathetic remark about Howard Dean, the 2004 Presidential candidate; she said that he had been unfairly treated in the American media. Hitchens, in the clear, helpful voice one might use to give street directions, replied that Dean was "a raving nut bag," and then corrected himself: "A raving, sinister, demagogic nut bag." He said, "I and a few other people saw he should be destroyed." He noted that, in 2003, Dean had given a speech at an abortion-rights gathering in which he recalled being visited, as a doctor, by a twelve-year-old who was pregnant by her father. ("You explain that to the American people who think that parental notification is a good idea," Dean said, to applause.) Dean appeared not to have referred the alleged rape to the police; he also, when pressed, admitted that the story was not, in all details, true. For Hitchens, this established that Dean was a "pathological liar."

"All politicians lie!" the women said.

"He's a *doctor*," Hitchens said.

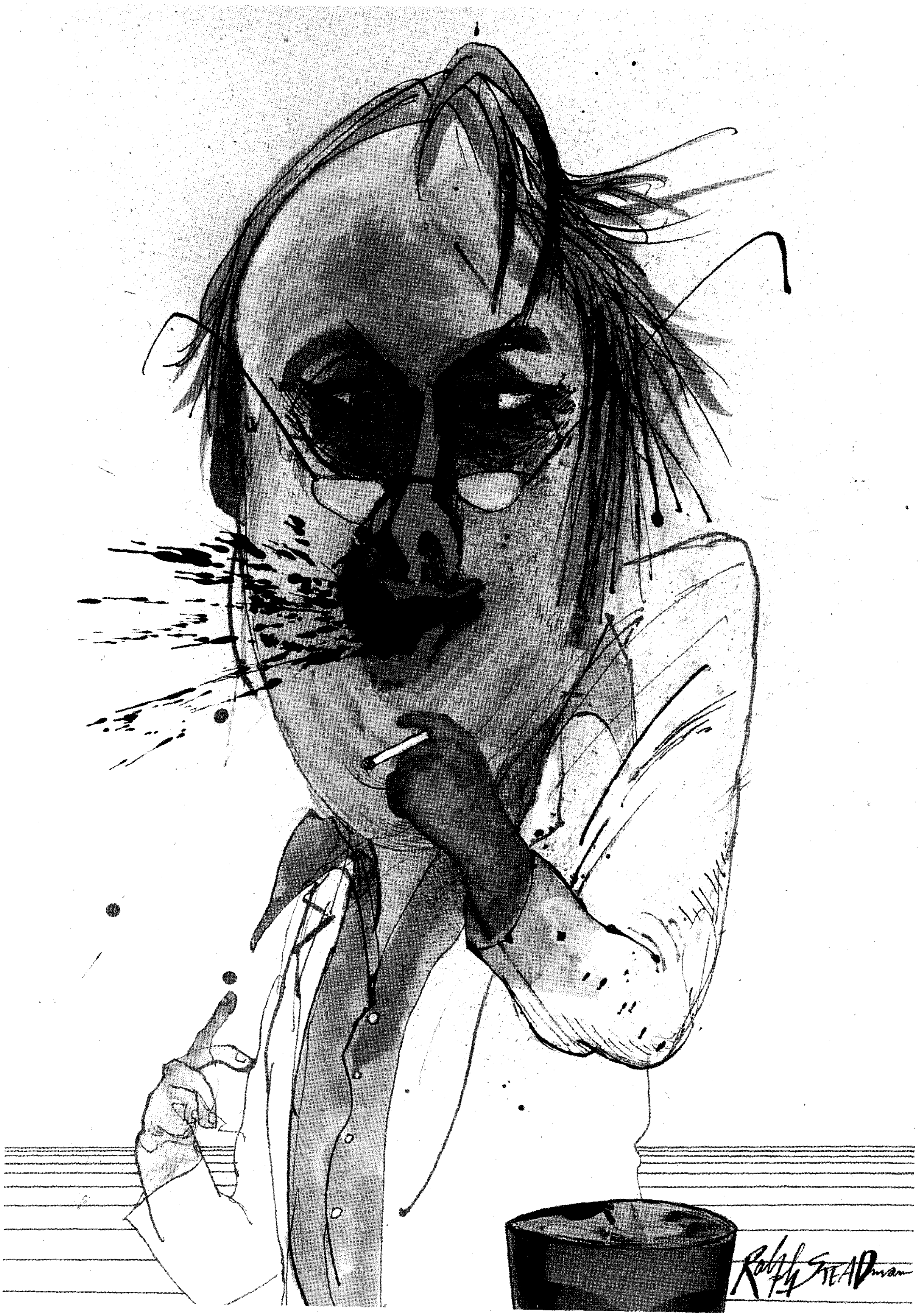
"But he's a politician."

"No, excuse me," Hitchens said. His tone tightened, and his mouth shrunk like a sea anemone poked with a stick; the Hitchens face can, at moments of dialectical urgency, or when seen in an unkindly lit Fox News studio, transform from roguish to sour. (Hitchens's friend Martin Amis, the novelist, has chided Hitchens for "doing that horrible thing with your lips.") "Fine," Hitchens said. "Now that I know that, to you, medical ethics are nothing, you've told me all I need to know. I'm not trying to persuade you. Do you think I care whether you agree with me? No. I'm telling you why I disagree with you. That I *do* care about. I have no further interest in any of your opinions. There's nothing you wouldn't make an excuse for."

"That's wrong!" they said.

"You know what? I wouldn't want you on my side." His tone was businesslike; the laughing protests died away. "I was telling you why I knew that Howard Dean was a psycho and a fraud, and you

According to one observer of Christopher Hitchens, "What's great about him is that being despised is actually the source of his creativity."



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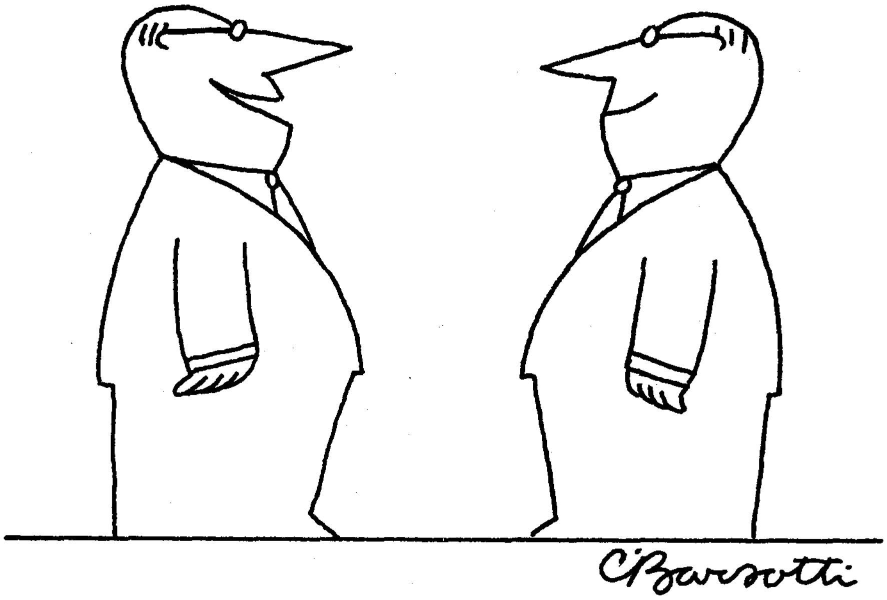


"That's a good look for you, J.B."

• •

say, 'That's O.K.' Fuck off. No, I mean it: fuck off. I'm telling you what I think are standards, and you say, 'What standards? It's fine, he's against the Iraq war.' Fuck. Off. You're MoveOn.org. 'Any liar will do. He's anti-Bush, he can say what he likes.' Fuck off. You think a doctor can lie in front of an audience of women on a major question, and claim to have suppressed evidence on rape and incest and then to have said he made it up?"

"But Christopher . . ."

"Save it, sweetie, for someone who cares. It will not be me. You love it, you suck on it. I now know what your standards are, and now you know what mine are, and that's all the difference—I hope—in the world."

What happened to Christopher Hitchens? How did a longtime columnist at *The Nation* become a contributor to the *Weekly Standard*, a supporter of President Bush in the 2004 election, and an invited speaker at the conservative activist David Horowitz's forthcoming Restoration Weekend, along with Ann Coulter and Rush Limbaugh? Or, to put it another way, how did Hitchens come to be a "Lying, Self-Serving, Fat-Assed, Chain-Smoking, Drunken, Opportunistic, Cynical Contrarian"? (This is from the title of an essay posted on CounterPunch, a Web site co-edited by Hitchens's former friend and *Nation* colleague Alexander Cockburn.) The question, in polite and impolite forms, goes around and around at Washington dinner parties: did Hitchens maintain high principles while the left drifted from him, or did he lose himself in vanity and ambition? The matter has even inspired a forthcoming anthology of attack and counterattack, "Terror, Iraq, and the Left: Christopher Hitchens and His Critics."

On the time line of the Hitchens apostasy, which runs from revolutionary socialism to a kind of neoconservatism, many dates are marked in boldface—his reassessment cannot be fixed to any one of them—and those familiar with Hitchens's work know that he has always thrived on sectarian battles, and always looked for "encouraging signs of polarization," a phrase he has borrowed from his late friend Israel Shahak, the Israeli activist. But, when I talked with Hitchens, our conversation began with events in 2001. By that year, Hitchens said, he had begun to doubt if his future lay in political journalism. He had, by then, published fifteen books, including one on the Elgin Marbles dispute, and slim, scornful volumes—modern versions of eighteenth-century pamphleteering—making the case against Henry Kissinger (mass murderer), Bill Clinton (sex criminal), and Mother Teresa (friend of despots). He had written, but not yet published, an admiring book about George Orwell's political clear-sightedness. He had a column for *Vanity Fair*, in addition to his "Minority Report" for *The Nation*, which he had started in 1982, a year after moving to America. But, he said, political commentary had become "increasingly boring. There were times when I was due to write a *Nation* column and I hadn't got a hugely strong motive to write." He no longer described himself as a socialist, an identity he had formed as a teenager, in the late sixties. He had taken to describing capitalism as the world's only true revolutionary force.

"I was becoming post-ideological," Hitchens recalled. "And I thought, Well, what I want is to write more about literature—not to dump politics, because one can never do that, but I remember thinking that I would make a real effort to understand Proust." Wherever possible, Hitchens writes as an oppositionist, which means that his panegyrics are delivered in the form of a bodyguard's shove against intruders; and in this case he had decided on a book-length riposte to Alain de Botton's "How Proust Can Change Your Life." Hitchens finished writing his notes on September 9th, then flew to Walla Walla, Washington, to give a lecture on Henry Kissinger that coincided with the filing of a federal lawsuit against Kissinger and other Nixon Administration officials by the family of René Schneider, the Chilean military commander murdered in 1970. "I made a speech to an excited audience, and I ended, 'I like to think that tomorrow, 11th September 2001, will be remembered for a long time as a landmark day in the struggle for human rights'—a prescient remark, I hope you'll agree. I got a standing ovation, signed a few books, kissed a few people, went to bed reasonably contented. You know the rest."

He went on, "The advice I've been giving to people all my life—that you may not be interested in the dialectic but the dialectic is interested in you; you can't give up politics, it won't give you up—was the advice I should have been taking myself. Because I did know that something like 9/11 would happen." So "it was goodbye to Marcel for a bit." (He has not written his Proust book, but, in 2004, he published a limpid essay on a new translation of "Swann's Way": "Through his eyes we see what actuates the dandy and the lover and the grandee and the hypocrite and the poseur, with a transparency unexampled except in Shakespeare or George Eliot," he wrote in *The Atlantic*. "And this ability, so piercing and at times even alarming, is not mere knowingness. It is not, in other words, the product of cynicism. To be so perceptive and yet so innocent—that, in a phrase, is the achievement of Proust.")

In a 2003 interview, Hitchens said that the events of September 11th filled him with "exhilaration." His friend Ian Buruma, the writer, told me, "I don't quite see Christopher as a 'man of action,' but he's always looking for the defining moment—as it were, our Spanish Civil War, where you put yourself on the right side, and stand up to the enemy." Hitchens foresaw "a war to the finish between everything I love and everything I hate." Here was a question on which history would judge him; and just as Orwell had (in his view) got it right on the greatest questions of the twentieth century—Communism, Fascism, and imperialism—so Hitchens wanted a future student to see that he had been similarly scrupulous and clear-eyed. (He once wrote, "I have tried for much of my life to write as if I was composing my sentences to be read posthumously.") His enemies stood in two groups: first, the forces of jihad, and, second, those in "the Chomsky-Zinn-Finkelstein quarter," as he has put it—the cohort of American leftists who seemed too ready to see the attacks as a rebuke to American imperialism. In his first *Nation* column after September 11th, Hitchens wrote that "the bombers of Manhattan represent fascism with an Islamic face. . . . What they abominate about 'the West,' to put it in a phrase, is not what Western liberals don't like and can't defend about their own system, but what they *do* like about it and must defend: its emancipated women, its scientific inquiry, its separation of religion from the state. Loose talk about chickens coming home to roost is the moral equivalent of the hateful garbage emitted by Falwell and Robertson."

Many American liberals would have had no argument with that; nor, indeed, with the way Hitchens jabbed at the film-maker Oliver Stone at a public meeting in Manhattan a few weeks later, when Stone referred to the "revolt of September 11th." ("Excuse me. Revolt? It was state-supported mass murder, using civilians as missiles.") Nevertheless, Hitchens felt compelled formally to remove himself from the American left. In a clarifying sign-off a few months later, he dropped his *Nation* column. This may have been largely a change of address rather than a change of mind—moving out of the house long after the divorce—but he detected some inner shift in 2001. "For the first time in my life, I felt myself in the position of the policeman," he told me. In part, this was a response to America's panic. "Nobody knew what was going on. This giant government, and huge empire. Bush was missing. Panic, impotence, shame. I've never known any feeling like it. What does one do when the forces of law and order have let you down, and the whole of society is stunned and terrified? Simply, I must find out what it's like to think like a cop. It shifts the angle, in a way that can't really be wrenched back again." During the I.R.A. bombing campaigns on the British mainland, which began in the nineteen-seventies, this had not happened. Then he had "kept two sets of books: I didn't like bombs, I didn't like the partition of Ireland." Now he felt as if he had "taken an oath to uphold and defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

We were in Hitchens's home in Washington. His top-floor apartment, with a wide view that includes No. 1 Observatory Circle, the Vice-Presidential residence, is large and handsome: sparely furnished, with a grand piano, books piled on the floor, a few embassy invitations on the mantelpiece, and prints and paintings propped against the walls rather than hung from them; these include an oil painting of Hitchens and Blue (a dark-haired, darkly dressed woman—a young Susan Sontag) with coffee, whiskey, and cigarettes on a table in front of them.

Hitchens has the life that a spirited thirteen-year-old boy might hope adulthood to be: he wakes up when he likes, works from home, is married to someone who wears leopard-skin high heels, and conducts heady, serious discussions late into the night. I arrived just after midday, and Hitchens said that it was "time for a cocktail"; he poured a large drink. His hair flopped over his forehead, and he pushed it back using just the tips of his fingers, his hand as unbending as a mannequin's.

He noted that he never likes going to bed. "I'm not that keen on the idea of being unconscious," he said. "There's plenty of time to be unconscious coming up." In Washington, his socializing usually takes place at home. "I can have some sort of control over who comes, what gets talked about, what gets eaten, what gets drunk, and the ashtrays," he said. "Call me set in my ways." (Hitchens's predominant tone is quietly self-parodying. Even his farewells are ironic: "It's been real," "Stay cool.") Guests at the Hitchens salon include people he first knew in London, who call him "Hitch," including Salman Rushdie, Ian McEwan, and his great friend Martin Amis ("The only blond I have ever really loved," Hitchens once said); long-standing American friends like Christopher Buckley and Graydon Carter; an international network of dissidents and intellectuals; and, these days, such figures as David Frum, the former Bush Administration speechwriter, and Grover Norquist, the conservative activist. In September, he hosted Barham Salih, a Kurd who is a Deputy Prime Minister of the new Iraqi government. Many guests can report seeing Hitchens step out of the room after dinner, write a column, then step back almost before the topic of conversation has changed.

Rushdie recalled an evening last year. "I met Paul Wolfowitz," he said, laughing. "And I discovered, to my immense surprise, that he's a very nice man." Wolfowitz, the neoconservative who served as the Deputy Secretary of Defense between 2001 and 2005, and who now runs the World Bank, was a primary architect of the invasion of Iraq; he has become the emblem of Hitchens's new political alignments. Wolfowitz respected Hitchens's record as a writer on human rights. He called Hitchens in the fall of 2002, at the prompting of Kevin Kellems, then his special adviser, and now an adviser at the World Bank. "It felt like Cold War espionage," Kellems recalled. "Contacting someone on the other side you think might want to defect." Hitchens accepted an invitation to lunch at the Pentagon. "I snuck him in," Kellems said. "We didn't put his name on the schedule."

As Wolfowitz knew, Hitchens was a

longtime observer of the cruelty of Saddam Hussein, and had spoken publicly for his removal since 1998. He supported the cause of Kurdish independence, and had been to Halabja and seen the injuries caused there by Iraqi chemical weapons; and he was friendly with dissident Iraqis in exile, including Ahmed Chalabi, of the Iraqi National Congress, which aggressively promoted the notion, now widely discounted, that Saddam was poised to become a nuclear power. After September 11th, and the subsequent defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan (upon which Hitchens addressed the British antiwar left in the pages of the *Guardian*, "Ha ha ha, and yah, boo"), he had thrown himself into the debate over Iraq, making speeches and writing for *Slate*. Brandishing the nineteen-thirties slogan "Fascism Means War," he argued that Saddam was something more than another tyrant; though he did not have nuclear weapons, he aspired to have them; his regime was on the verge of implosion, and better that it should implode under supervision, with the West providing "armed assistance to the imminent Iraqi and Kurdish revolutions." Hitchens told me, "The number of us who would have criticized Bush if he *hadn't* removed Saddam—that's certainly the smallest minority I've ever been a member of."

I mentioned the Pentagon meeting. "Wolfowitz was not asking my advice about Iraq—don't run away with that idea," Hitchens said. "He just felt that those who worked for the ousting of Saddam should get on closer terms with each other." According to Kellems, who attended the meeting, "Hitchens said, 'I was trying to signal you' "—through his writing—"and Wolfowitz said, 'I wondered.'" Hitchens disputes that memory; he does remember asking Wolfowitz for reassurances that, in the event of an invasion, the United States would protect the Kurds from the Turks. They talked about Rwanda and Bosnia, about the history of genocide and the cost of inaction. Kellems, who has since become a friend of Hitchens, described "two giant minds unleashed in the room. They were finishing each other's sentences." According to Hitchens, Wolfowitz is a "bleeding heart," and he went on, "There are not many Republicans, or Democrats, who lie awake at night worrying about what's happening to the Palestinians, but he does." (Hitchens has been a decades-long agitator for the Palestinian cause; he co-edited a book on the subject with Edward Said, the late Palestinian-American scholar.) "And Wolfowitz wants America's human-rights ethic to be straight and consistent as far as possible. And if there's an anomaly he's aware of it."

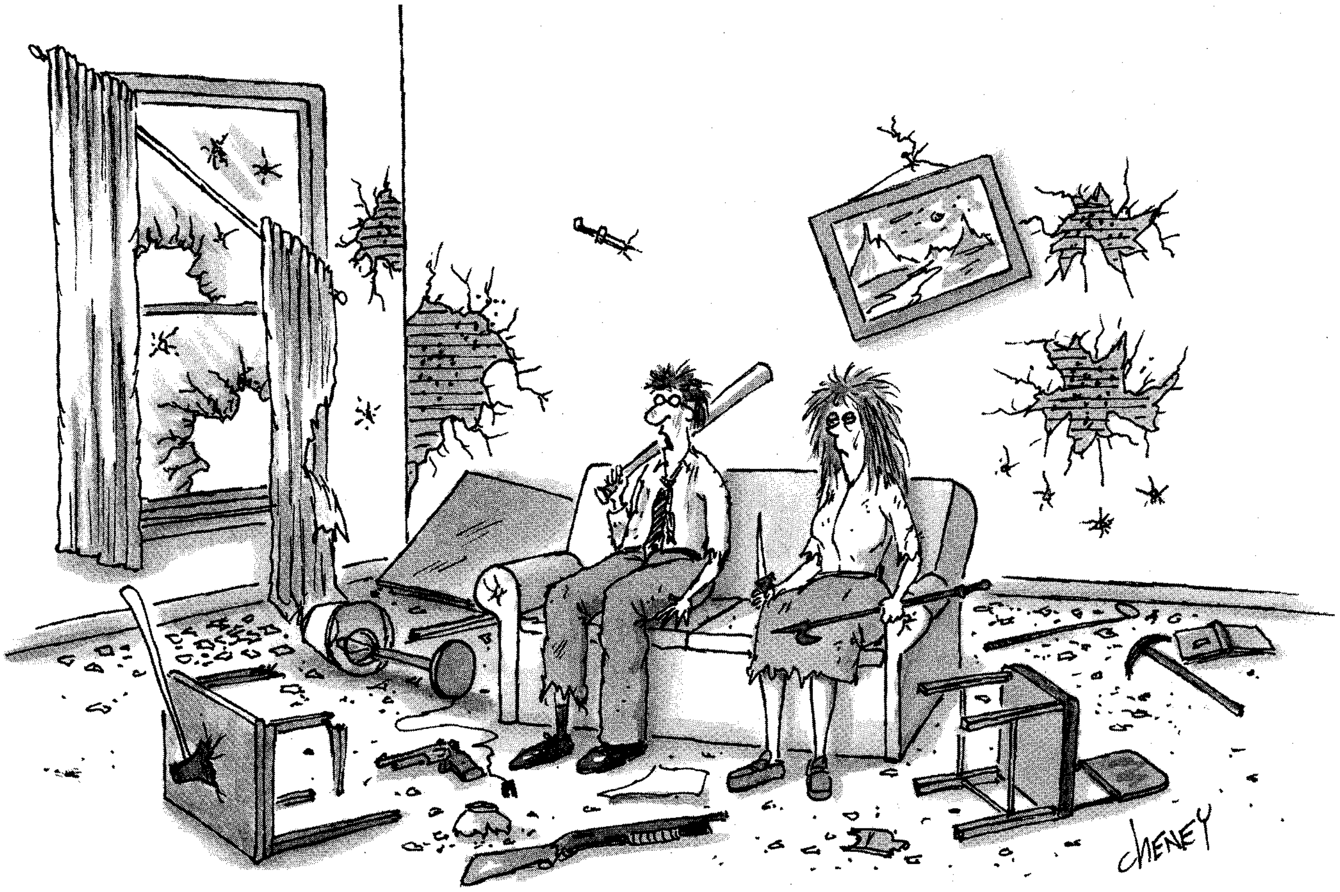
On April 9, 2003, the day the statue of Saddam was pulled down in central Baghdad, Hitchens wrote, "So it turns out that all the slogans of the anti-war movement were right after all. And their demands were just. 'No War on Iraq,' they said—and there wasn't a war on Iraq. Indeed, there was barely a 'war' at all. 'No Blood for Oil,' they cried, and the oil wealth of Iraq has been duly rescued from attempted sabotage with scarcely a drop spilled." That July, Hitchens and a few other reporters flew to Baghdad with Wolfowitz. "It's quite extraordinary to see the way that American soldiers are welcomed," Hitchens told Fox News upon his return. "To see the work that they're doing and not just rolling up these filthy networks of Baathists and jihadists, but building schools, opening soccer stadiums, helping people connect to the Internet, there is a really intelligent political program as well as a very tough military one."

Three years later, Hitchens is still on Fox News talking about the Iraq war. He has not flinched from his position that the invasion was necessary, nor declined any serious invitation to defend that position publicly, even as the violence in Iraq has increased, and American opinion has turned against the intervention and the President who launched it. In this role, he has presented himself with an immense test of his rhetorical mettle—one can say that without doubting his sincerity. He often seems to have had more at stake, and certainly more oratorical energy, than anyone in the government. (In recent months, the trope of "Islamic fascism," which Hitchens has used frequently since his 2001 *Nation* column, has reached the top layers of government—in August, Bush said that the country was "at war with Islamic fascists"—and he has had to deny the charge that he is writing Administration speeches.) Today, he always carries with him—like the Kurdistan flag in his lapel—debating points, worn smooth with use: Abdul Rahman Yasin, who was involved in the 1993 World Trade Center attack, took refuge in Iraq; Dr. Mahdi Obeidi, Saddam's senior physicist, had centrifuge parts buried in his garden; as late as 2003, Iraqi agents were trying to buy missiles from North Korea; Tariq Aziz, Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, offered Hitchens's friend Rolf Ekéus, the weapons inspector, a two-and-a-half-million-dollar bribe. "I feel like Bellow's Herzog, writing crazed letters," Hitchens said, smiling. "The occupation has not turned out as one would have liked, but the main problem is to have underestimated the utter evil of the other side. I wouldn't have believed they could keep up a campaign of murdering people at random."

Hitchens asks his opponents this: "We should have left Iraq the way it was? However I replay the tape, however much I wish things had been done differently, I can't get to that position." He acknowledged that his support of the war had caused him some intellectual discomfort. "The most difficult thing is having to defend an Administration that isn't defensible," he said. On television and radio, he explained, "you're invited on to defend the Administration's view on something and then someone's invited on to attack it. You don't want to begin by putting distance, because then it looks like you're covering your ass. You take the confrontation as it actually is. I'm not going to spend a few silky minutes saying, 'You know, I don't really like Bush and his attitude toward stem cells.' No. Wait. The motion before the house is this: Is this a just and necessary war or is it not?"

He went on, "I'm open to the prosecution of the Administration, even the impeachment of some members, for the way they've fucked up the war, and also the way they exploit it domestically. But do not run away with the idea that my telling you this would satisfy any of my critics. They want me to immolate myself, and I sincerely believe that for some of them, when they see bad news from Iraq, the reaction is simply 'This will make Hitchens look bad!' I've been trying to avoid solipsism, but I've come to believe there are such people."

Hitchens finds support on the right, of course. Peter Wehner, a deputy assistant to the President and the director of the office of strategic initiatives in the White House, invited Hitchens to give a lecture to White House staff a few years ago, and now jokingly addresses him as "Comrade"



"Maybe it's time we started trying to kill other people."

* * *

in e-mails. Wehner admired Hitchens as a "fantastic political pugilist" even when they were on opposing camps in the eighties. Now, he said, "On the issues of greatest gravity and historical importance—the war against global jihadism and the liberation of Iraq—I am thrilled to be on the same side of the divide as Christopher."

To Hitchens's left, there is enmity and derision. This summer, a mock-obituary, published online, described him dying in the manner of Major Kong: riding a warhead out of a B-52 in a future American war in Iran. Another Internet tribute posted a photograph of him with the caption "Hitchens: 'I'll Kick Saddam's Fucking Teeth In.' " A parodic MySpace page introduces Hitchens this way: "I am a man of the Enlightenment. Words fall from my tongue and you eat them up like a starving kitten on the street." Last year, Hitchens was jeered when he debated the British M.P. George Galloway in New York. When he appeared on "Real Time with Bill Maher," this summer, Hitchens said "Fuck you" to a hostile crowd and, to Maher, "Your audience, which will clap at apparently anything, is frivolous."

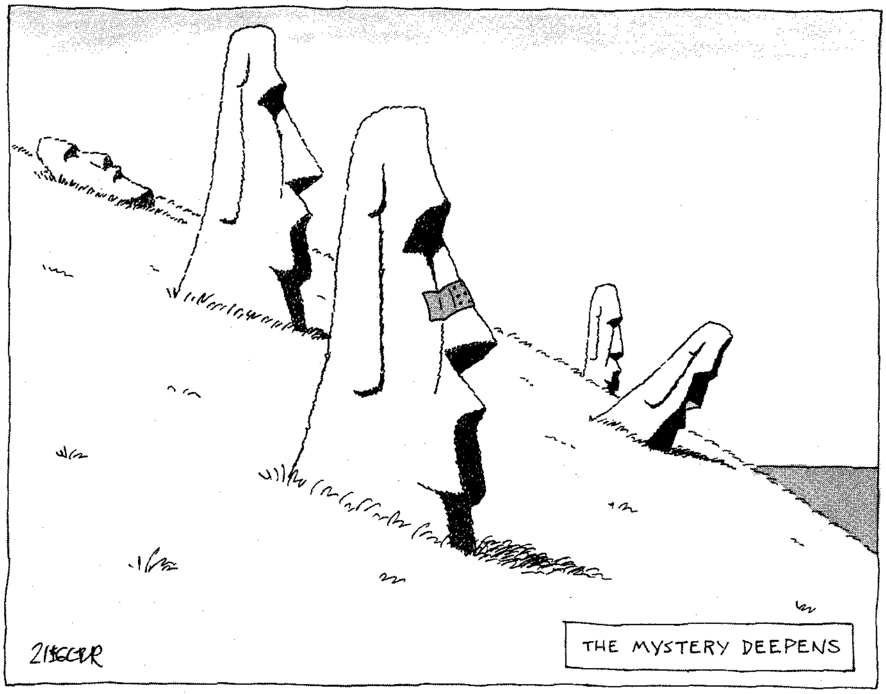
Many friends and former friends have been watching Hitchens's progress with disappointment, or something sharper. Colin Robinson, his former publisher at Verso Books, said, "I hope it might be possible to save some bits of Christopher. It's a terrible loss to the left—it's so rare to have someone in the mainstream media who could go out and give the other side a dusting." Using a similar tone of regret, Eric Alterman, a *Nation* columnist and an estranged friend, called him a "performance artist." Alexander Cockburn told me, "Between the two of them, my sympathies were with Mother Teresa. If you were sitting in rags in a gutter in Calcutta, who would be more likely to give you a bowl of soup?"

Hitchens claims to be unperturbed by his critics. "You'd think I'd driven over their pets and abducted their daughters," Hitchens said. "I'd like to know what brings that on." A pause. "So I could do it more." He added, "People say, 'What's it like to be a minority of one, or a kick-bag for the Internet?' It washes off me like jizz off a porn star's face." (Thomas Cushman, one of the editors of "Terror, Iraq, and the Left," said of Hitchens, "What's great about him is that being despised is actually the source of his creativity.")

I asked Rushdie if recent events had taken their toll on his friend. "Christopher is well equipped to take care of himself," Rushdie said, "but I do think that some of the people that he is now aligned with are not really people that he's like. That must be very strange for him, and I worry about that."

When I told Hitchens that some friends were worried, he smiled through his annoyance. "I suppose it's nice to be worried about," he said. "It's almost like being cared about."

In 1982, Hitchens wrote an essay for *The Nation* about Evelyn Waugh's "Brideshead Revisited," and the point he was most keen to make was that although the First World War predates the action



THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

of the novel, it remains at the center of the story. Hitchens quoted at length from Waugh's honeyed description of the excursion made by Charles Ryder and Sebastian Flyte to the Venice of the early twenties, a passage of champagne cocktails and gondolas that ends with Sebastian saying, "It's rather sad to think that whatever happens you and I can never possibly get involved in a war."

I asked Carol Blue about this passage. She said that her husband, who was brought up in an English military family in the years following the Second World War, had an aspect of "those men who were never really in battle and wished they had been. There's a whole tough-guy, 'I am violent, I will use violence, I will take some of these people out before I die' talk, which is really key to his psychology—I don't care what he says. I think it is partly to do with his upbringing."

The Second World War was "the entire subject of conversation" when Hitchens was growing up, he told me: "I didn't know films were made out of anything else." Every Boxing Day, the family would toast the sinking of the German battleship Scharnhorst. Portsmouth, where he first lived, was still scarred by Nazi air raids. Hitchens's father was a career Navy man from a working-class family who reached the rank of commander and, with that, a foothold in the middle classes. He met Hitchens's mother, who was from a lower-middle-class Liverpudlian family, during the war. Commander Hitchens was not a garrulous man, but some observations of his have stuck with his son. "They are all kind of solid," Christopher said. "He said, 'Beware of girls with thin lips'; 'Don't let them see you with just your socks on'; and 'Socialism is founded on sand.' " His father also said that "the war was the only time when he knew what he was doing."

His parents, Hitchens said, were of a class that "resent but sort of envy the rich, but they're terrified of organized labor, and feel themselves to be the neglected, solid citizens." Commander Hitchens was a conservative of the peeved, country-going-to-the-dogs sort—a Thatcherite in waiting. Christopher abandoned that conservatism as a boy but perhaps absorbed the lesson that politics is a form of anger. "My father was not a misanthrope, exactly, but he thought that the whole thing"—that is, life—"was a bit overrated."

Commander Hitchens had a Baptist-Calvinist background. His wife was Jewish, but she never told her husband or her children. Hitchens learned this about her—and himself—only long after her death. ("On hearing the tidings, I was pleased to find that I was pleased," he has written.) She was more social than Hitchens's father, and more alert to signs of class slippage: it was vital to decant milk into a jug before taking it to the table, and to avoid saying "toilet." Hitchens once overheard an argument between his parents about the cost of boarding school, in which his mother said, "If there is going to be a ruling class in this country, then Christopher is going to be in it."

She succeeded: Christopher was privately and expensively educated (as was Peter, his younger brother, who is a prominent right-wing newspaper columnist in London) and now has the accent—and white suit—of the English upper-middle classes. Ian Buruma detects in Hitchens some mix of regard and disdain "for the 'real' officer class. Waugh had a bit of that, and Wodehouse—Christopher's favorite writers—which is one reason that Wodehouse ended up in America. America allows you to play the role of the fruity upper-class Englishman, whereas in England you'd feel vulnerable to exposure."

Hitchens went to boarding school, in Devon, at the age of eight. He was happy, but, he said, "a radicalizing thing for me was the realization that my parents had scrimped and saved to allow me to be the first member of my family to go to boarding school. I was surrounded by these sons of Lancastrian businessmen who thought it was their perfect right to be there. That had a huge effect: these fuckers don't even know when they're well off." He also saw through Mrs. Watts, his instructor on religious matters, "who told us how good it was of God to make all our vegetation green, because it was the color that was most restful for our eyes, and how horrible it would be if it was orange. I remember sitting there, in my shorts and sandals, and thinking, That *can't* be right." Hitchens has just finished a book informed by a lifetime of steely anticlerical thought, "God Is Not Great," to be published next year, which begins with Mrs. Watts, and goes on to say of his religious friends, "I would be quite content to go to their children's bar-mitzvahs, to marvel at their Gothic cathedrals, to 'respect' their belief that the Koran was dictated, though exclusively in Arabic, to an illiterate prophet, or to interest myself in Wicca and Hindu and Jain consolations. And as it happens, I will continue to do this without insisting on the polite reciprocal condition—*which is that they in turn leave me alone.* But this, religion is ultimately incapable of doing. As I write these words, and as you read them, people of faith are in their different ways planning your and my destruction. . . . *Religion poisons everything.*"

Hitchens used to have, at times, a "pronounced" stutter. "One way of curing it was to force yourself to speak in public," he said. In his first school debate, Hitchens spoke against new immigration restrictions (nobody else would), and found that the techniques required—such as charm and the sudden, cutthroat withdrawal of charm—came naturally to him. His later success in America derived in part from his bruising rhetorical talents. In Britain, such qualities are on show every week at Prime Minister's Question Time, but in America Hitchens was a novel act. "It's extraordinary," he said. "I've been invited onto shows like 'Crossfire' and told, 'Can't you hold it down a bit?' "

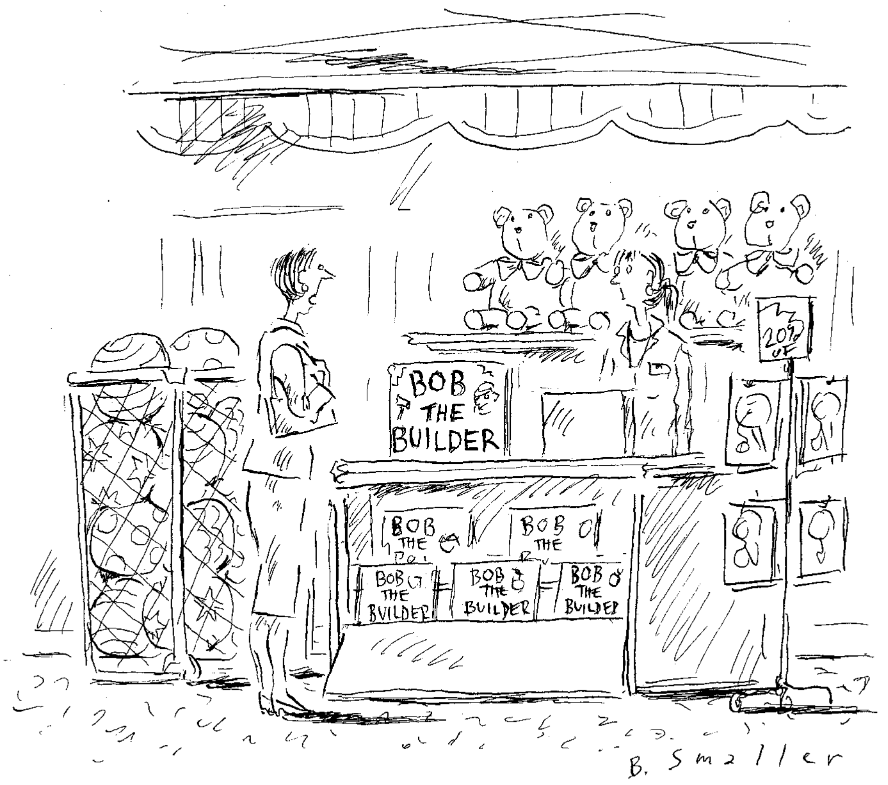
In 1964, he ran as the Labour Party candidate in his school's mock election (again, nobody else would). He lost, but the Labour Party won in the country. The new government quickly proved itself to be, in Hitchens's words, "completely corrupt and cynical"—backing President Johnson on Vietnam, for example. His response was to join the Party, thus starting a career of antagonistic idealism. "That's why you join a party, to take up the struggles within it," Hitchens explained. "And that's what pushed me to the left—the humiliation of the Labour Government." By the time he came to study politics, philosophy, and economics at Balliol College, Oxford—semi-official motto: "Effortless Superiority"—he had been invited to join a Trotskyist group, the International Socialists. (He was spotted while skillfully heckling a Maoist at a public meeting.)

As a student, Hitchens was good-looking and charismatic. He does not remember ever having met Bill Clinton, his Oxford contemporary, but he told me that there was a student who, at different times, was his girlfriend and Clinton's, before she began a lifetime of lesbianism. He met Martin Amis and, for a time, shared a house with James Fenton, the poet, whom Hitchens had brought into the International Socialists. "He wore a beret—I have to tell you that he did," Fenton said of Hitchens, remembering that his comrade "was not known as a stalwart of the 'getting up at six to go to the factory gates' brigade. I used to think that the revolution would break out and I'd be waking Christopher, trying to get him out of bed."

In fact, something a little like this happened. During the Paris uprisings of 1968, transport links with France were cut before many, including Hitchens, could cross the Channel. "It's a big regret of my life," he said. Indeed, when he talks about the Cromwellian and American revolutions, his tone is almost nostalgic. (His personal identification with Thomas Paine is nearly as strong as it is with Orwell; his short study of Paine, published this year, was dedicated to Jalal Talabani—"first elected president of the Republic of Iraq; sworn foe of fascism and theocracy"—rather as "The Rights of Man" was dedicated to George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette.) But wherever Hitchens might have been a witness to an explosion of popular feeling, either no explosion occurred or it was delayed until he left. He recalled flying out of Iraq the day before the deaths, in July, 2003, of Saddam's sons, Uday and Qusay. When Hitchens described the celebrations that followed, you could hear a man struggling to transform a secondhand report into a firsthand one by force of will power alone: "I could have been there—it kills me! That night, the entire cityscape was a blaze of weapons being fired in celebration. It was like ten million Fourth of Julys . . ."

At times, Hitchens can look like a brain trying to pass as a muscle. He reads the world intellectually, but emphasizes his physical responses to it. Talking of jihadism, he said, "You know, recognizing an enemy—it's not just your mental cortex. Everything in you *physically* conditions you to realize that this means no good, like when you see a copperhead coming toward you. It's basic: it lives or I do." When Hitchens's prose hits an off note, it often includes the visceral or the pseudo-visceral, whether in a paean to oral sex for *Vanity Fair* ("I was at once bewitched and slain by the warm, moist cave of her mouth") or in commentaries on current affairs: "reeking fumes of the suicide-murderers," "the stench of common bribery, pungently reeking of crude oil." On these occasions, the bookish Hitchens is elbowed aside by an alternate self: a man as twitchingly alert as Trotsky at the head of the Red Army.

Such performances of masculinity don't appear exclusively on the page. Not long ago, in Baltimore, I saw Hitchens challenge a man—perhaps homeless and a little unglued mentally—who had started walking in step with his wife and a woman friend of hers while Hitchens



"Do you have something more like Alex the Architect?"

walked some way ahead. Hitchens dropped back to form a flank between the women and the man, then said, "This is the polite version. Go away." The man ambled off. Hitchens pressed home the victory. "Go away *faster*," he said.

"Wouldn't it have been easier to cross the road?" Blue asked, innocently.

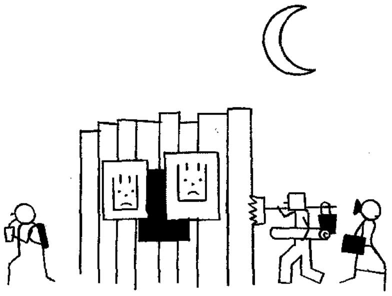
While still at Oxford, Hitchens wrote his first article for the *New Statesman*, a left-leaning weekly. Upon graduating and moving to London, he became an occasional contributor, while taking a number of jobs in mainstream journalism, and selling the *Socialist Worker* on street corners. The *New Statesman* was enjoying a golden moment: its staff and writers included Amis, Fenton, McEwan, and Julian Barnes, the novelist. The Friday-lunch gatherings of *Statesman* hot shots and other writers, in which they out-joked each other on matters of sex, literature, and nuclear disarmament, now have the status of literary legend. (The *Statesman* staff played a game in which the task was to think of the phrase least likely to be uttered by each member. For Hitchens: "I don't care how rich you are, I'm not coming to your party." For Amis: "You look a bit depressed, why don't you sit down and tell me all about it?")

Romantically, Hitchens described himself as playing second fiddle to an unstoppable Amis: "I'd basically be holding his coat and refilling his glass, and trying to learn from the Master." In fact, Hitchens's own appeal was considerable; among the girlfriends he had before his first marriage was Anna Wintour, who is now the editor of *Vogue*. Hitchens told me, "When I was younger—this will surprise you, seeing now the bloated carcass of the Hitch—I used to get quite a bit of attention from men. And, um. It was sometimes quite difficult, especially when you hadn't seen it coming. I was considered reasonably pretty, I suppose, between seventeen and twenty-five. I remember noticing when it stopped, and thinking, Oh dear. What? None of these guys want to sleep with me anymore?" Asked about his own activities, he said, "Nobody who's been to public school can pretend to know nothing of the subject. And even at university there was an epicene interlude. But it wasn't what I wanted at all." (In 1999, Alexander Cockburn wrote, "Many's the time male friends have had to push Hitchens's mouth, fragrant with martinis, away" during hellos and goodbyes; Hitchens said that he had no memory of "making a bid for the clean-limbed and cupid-lipped Alexander Cockburn.")

In December, 1973, Hitchens, then twenty-four, published a lead article about Greek politics in the *New Statesman*. Datelined Athens, it was a serious, rather dry analysis of political developments following the ousting of the dictator George Papadopoulos. It avoided the kind of foreign-crisis writing he abhors. (His parody: "As I stand here pissed and weeping in this burning hell, the body of a child lies like a broken doll in the street.") Almost the only local color was a glimpse of civil and religious icons on the wall of an Athens police station.

Although the article does not hint at it, there was an awful reason for Hitchens seeing the police-station wall. He told me the story: Not long after Hitchens graduated from Oxford, his mother left his father, and moved in with another man. "He was a charmer, which my father was not. He was witty, burbling, could do music, poetry, but couldn't make a living. He was a flake, and not always so delicious. He had this dark, depressive side." In the fall of 1973, a friend called Hitchens one morning in his London apartment to say she'd just read a newspaper article about the death of a Mrs. Hitchens in Athens. Hitchens flew alone to Greece, to learn that, in a suicide pact, his mother had taken an overdose of sleeping pills in a bedroom of the Georges V Hotel, while, in the bathroom, her companion had done the same, and also cut himself severely. "It was a terrible Polanski scene," Hitchens said.

At the hotel, he said, "I went out of the bathroom to the window and had my first view of the Acropolis. It was a perfect view." He learned that his mother had tried his number in London many times in the previous days, but he had missed the calls. "Before the days of answering machines," he said. "If I'd picked up, it could have been enough to stop her, because I usually could make her laugh. That was a bitter reflection."



Athens was in political turmoil— "this mad, Costa-Gavras world." Hitchens, whose skills and taste in journalism draw him to penetrating quick studies, sized the city up. "You can learn a lot in a short time when there are tanks in the street," he said. He wrote the article when he got home. "Everyone said, 'Christopher, how could you?' I said, 'How could I not?' It was therapeutic to write. No—consoling. Useful." He added that, in the fifteen years before his father's death, Hitchens never again discussed with him the death of his mother.

When Turkey invaded Cyprus the following summer, Hitchens realized that he had neglected an important part of the story. Cyprus became a specialty, and, later, the subject of his first book, which described the island as having been betrayed by outside powers; an accusing finger was pointed at Henry Kissinger. Hitchens became a figure in radical Cypriot circles, where he met his first wife, Eleni Meleagrou, whom he used to introduce as "the terrorist." James Fenton sees Cyprus as decisive in Hitchens's political development, not only because he had the experience of becoming a "mini-celebrity" but because of his disappointment in the British failure to protect Cyprus during the invasion: in other words, the dishonorable failure of an imperial power to make a military intervention. Hitchens, unlike Fenton and most others on the British left, supported Margaret Thatcher's gunboat response to the Argentine occupation of the Falkland Islands, in 1982.

By then, Hitchens and Meleagrou had married and moved to America. Hitchens pounded away at Reagan and capital punishment as *The Nation's* Washington columnist, and reported for other magazines from the Middle East, Central America, and Eastern Europe. The couple split up in 1989, not long after Hitchens met Carol Blue in Los Angeles. (Meleagrou and their two children, now aged twenty-two and seventeen, live in London.) That winter, Hitchens and Blue flew to Eastern Europe, to be witness to the revolutionary events of the time. It may need to be said: These were events that Hitchens welcomed. In 2001, Peter Hitchens—

who has Christopher's voice exactly, but is a churchgoer who is unpersuaded by Darwin—wrote an article in *The Spectator* ("O Brother, Where Art Thou?") that recalled "a Reagan-era discussion about the relative merits and faults of the Western and Soviet systems, during which Christopher said that he didn't care if the Red Army watered its horses in Hendon," a London suburb. On the occasion being described, as Christopher later tartly explained to readers of *Vanity Fair* (in an article entitled "O Brother, Why Art Thou?"), he had been telling a joke. The brothers did not speak for four years. Hitchens said to me, "I've spent far more time talking to *you* than to him in the last twenty-five years." Peter Hitchens said, "If we weren't related, I don't think we'd have much to do with each other," but he showed a kind of regard for what he sees as the consistency of his brother's position: "He's a Trotskyist, really, not in terms of being a Bolshevik revolutionary but in that he is an idealist and he is impressed by military command." (Peter, too, was once in the International Socialists.)

In a similar dispute, Martin Amis, in "Koba the Dread," a nonfiction book on Stalin, cast Hitchens as, essentially, an apologist for Soviet Communism. Hitchens was irritated. He had always been "solid" on the subject of the Soviet bloc, he said; he was as much a friend of the opposition there as he was of the opposition in South Africa or in El Salvador. "Everything I've *thought* is on the record," Hitchens went on. If he had been a Stalinist, "It would show, even if I was trying to conceal it." Hitchens wrote two barbed responses: one in *The Atlantic*, and the other in the *Guardian*, which was headlined "DON'T. BE. SILLY." He told me, "Martin does not know the fucking difference between Bukharin and Bakunin." (His friendship with Amis survived this discord.)

In 1989, the Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa against Salman Rushdie, on the ground that his novel "The Satanic Verses" defamed Islam. "There's a sense in which all this—Christopher's move—is partly my fault," Rushdie said. "The fatwa made Christopher feel that radical Islam was not only trying to kill his friend; it was a huge new threat to the kind of world he wanted to live in. And I have the sense he felt there was a liberal failure to get the point of what was happening." The fatwa split the left. As Ian Buruma put it, "The instinct was, whenever there was any conflict between Third World opinion and the Western metropole, you'd always favor the Third World. Yet here was a case where people were forced to take the opposite view." For Hitchens, that task was simplified by his contempt for religion.

LATTER-DAY SAINTS
Eats however many grams of fibre you're supposed to.
Always makes his own sausages.
Does all the grocery shopping.
Is putting up with 56K modem.
Jogs ten miles a day, no matter what.
Buys her shampoo in an ordinary drugstore.
Forcing self to read "Beowulf," although she hates it.
Has commuted from New Canaan every day for 32 years.
Doesn't own a TV.

Hitchens helped arrange a meeting between Rushdie and President Clinton, in 1993. But he had by then taken a position on the President, derived from policy difference and suspicion of Clinton's character (but also, possibly, from awareness of the gap in political potency between two Oxford contemporaries, one of them being the leader of the free world). Hitchens despised him, and charged him with drug running, rape, and other crimes. He also became one of the loudest critics of Clinton's bombing of the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Sudan at the time of the Monica Lewinsky scandal: Clinton had "killed wogs," he wrote, to save his skin. While Hitchens's literary and historical writing has allowed for nuanced appraisals, even forgiveness, of morally complex figures—in a 2005 book on Jefferson, for example, Hitchens finds his way past the fact of his slaveowning—the political present elicits prosecutorial zeal.

In 1992, Hitchens had begun a column for *Vanity Fair;* he was happy to discover that he could vastly increase his income and readership without having to watch his tongue—"a breakthrough for me," he said. The same year, he went to Bosnia at his own expense; as he called for armed intervention there, three years before the Clinton Administration acted, he found himself endorsing the same petitions as many neoconservatives, including Wolfowitz. In 1999, in an incident that some see as the true start of Hitchens's political pilgrimage, he told House Judiciary Committee staff members who approached him that Sidney Blumenthal, a longtime friend who was then working in the Clinton White House, had gossiped to Hitchens about Monica Lewinsky being a "stalker." Blumenthal had testified that he had not made such remarks, so the claim put him at risk of a perjury charge and, potentially, strengthened the impeachment case against Clinton. It was possible to read Hitchens's action as a gesture of principle, but many who knew him saw it as a vicious act: he was "Snitchens." "He'd got to that moment in life when he was asking himself if he could Make A Difference," Alexander Cockburn told me, in an e-mail. "So he sloshed his way across his own personal Rubicon and tried to topple Clinton via a betrayal of his close friendship."

When I asked Hitchens about this period, he defended his actions but also said, "It seems to me to have happened to somebody else. That's true of a lot of the fights I took part in before 2001. Seemed like a good idea at the time, but it shrinks incredibly compared to Baghdad and Beirut and New York."

"That episode did hurt him," Buruma said. "He lost friends, he felt isolated in Washington, and I think there was a time when he really felt bruised."

Hitchens's splenetic Clinton book, "No One Left to Lie To," was published months after the Blumenthal incident. Verso, his publishing house, threw a party at Pravda, a SoHo restaurant. Colin Robinson recalled, "It's the only launch party I've ever been to where people booed the author."

The Hitchens-Blue partnership has a grad-school air. It's hard to see who pays the bills or fills the fridge. Blue can get stuck at the post-shower, towel-wearing stage of the day. (Her husband, with affection: "Darling, you would be so much more convincing if you were dressed.") Hitchens is not hapless—he meets his many deadlines and catches his many planes—but it's unsettling to watch him rinse a single spoon for four minutes, or hear the pandemonium over the supply of cigarette lighters. (He has cut back from smoking three packs a day.) He is a late-learning and scary driver. He does not wear a watch, although he looks at his bare left wrist when trying to calculate the time.

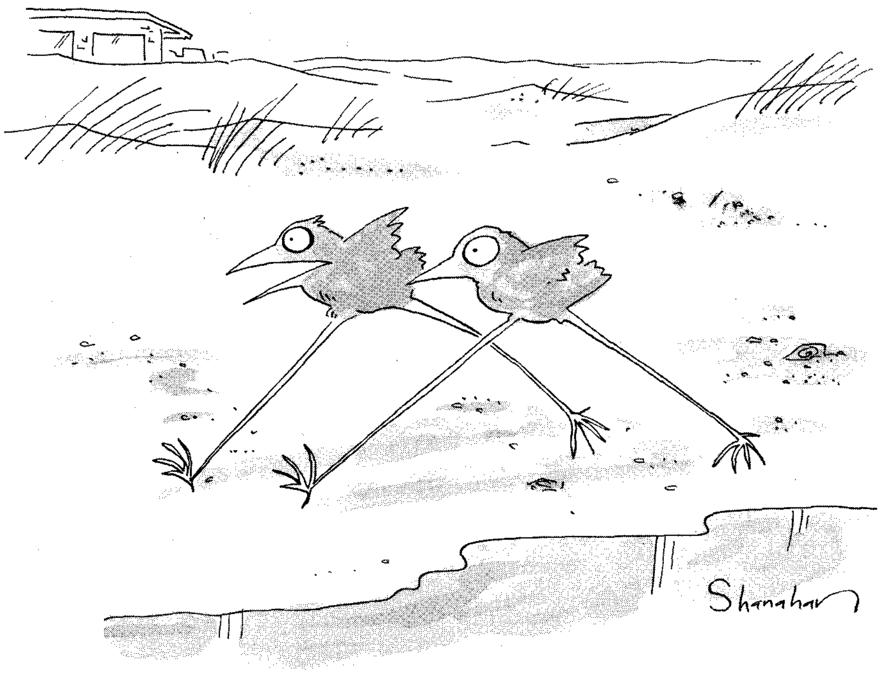
One morning during the family's summer escape to Northern California—they stay in a guesthouse built next to the home of Blue's parents—Blue and I drove to a local supermarket. She walked the store's aisles with an air of rock-star puzzlement that may have been heightened for my benefit; she did not want to seem like a housewife. We left with sandwiches, a cherry pie, and two bottles of whiskey, and nothing that looked beyond the horizon of the next meal.

When we returned with our provisions, at about one o'clock, Hitchens, who had been working, was sitting at his desk with a drink. On the walls around him were some color printouts of kittens and puppies sitting in lines. He pointed to a manuscript of "God Is Not Great," a book that he thinks may have more heft and permanence than anything he has written before, in a career of rapid responses and public lashings. "I have been, in my head, writing it for many years," he said. "Religion is going to be the big subject until the end of my life. And I wanted to make an intervention."

Hitchens had already finished the morning period of mail and e-mail he refers to as "telegrams and anger" (a quotation from "Howards End"). He had given his attention that day to the wiretap lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union against the National Security Agency; in January, he accepted the A.C.L.U.'s invitation to become a named plaintiff, denting his reputation as an Administration cheerleader. He had also begun a review of Ann Coulter's "Godless: The Church of Liberalism," for an obscure new British journal. He was not doing it for free, but the gesture was still generous; Hitchens, who is unusually lacking in professional competitiveness, makes himself available to younger writers and editors. He also teaches: he is presently a visiting professor at the New School, and he is supervising the Ph.D. thesis, on Orwell, of Thomas Veale, a U.S. Army major, who calls Hitchens the "only nineteen-thirties liberal in existence."

Hitchens had started writing an hour or so before, planning on leniency: "I was thinking of hammering her for the first half and being a bit gentle the second." (He shares Coulter's disregard for Joseph Wilson, the diplomat.) But he had written a thousand words, and he was not through hammering. "I thought I'd do a thousand words by lunchtime—my usual ambition if I'm doing a short piece," he said. But he now saw that he could get it all done before eating. "If I can't fuck up Ann Coulter before lunch then I shouldn't be in this business," he said. Not long afterward, he came into the kitchen and handed me the finished review.

We had lunch outside. Hitchens ignored the sandwiches and put his fork in the cherry pie, moving outward from the center. He had a postproduction glow. "Writing is mainly recreational," he said.



"I keep telling myself I've got to slow down."

"I'm not happy when I'm not doing it." He can entertain himself in other ways—he strained to remember them—such as "playing with the cats and the daughter. But if I take even a day away from it I'm very uneasy."

In the past few years, Hitchens has published, in addition to his books on Orwell, Jefferson, and Paine, a book of oppositionist advice entitled "Letters to a Young Contrarian"; a collection of his writings on the Iraq war; and a giant miscellany, "Love, Poverty, and War." He wrote "God Is Not Great" in four months. He has contributed to dozens of publications (including *Golf Digest*—he plays the game). He almost never uses the backspace, delete, or cut-and-paste keys. He writes a single draft, at a speed that caused his *New Statesman* colleagues to place bets on how long it would take him to finish an editorial. What emerges is ready for publication, except for one weakness: he's not an expert punctuator, which reinforces the notion that he is in the business of transcribing a lecture he can hear himself giving.

Earlier, in answer to a question I hadn't asked, Blue had said to me, "Once in a while, it seems like he might be drunk. Aside from that, even though he's obviously an alcoholic, he functions at a really high level and he doesn't act like a drunk, so the only reason it's a bad thing is it's taking out his liver, presumably. It would be a drag for Henry Kissinger to live to a hundred and Christopher to keel over next year."

Hitchens, too, brought up the subject of alcohol before I did. "You're going to want to talk about this," he said, not wrongly, pointing at his glass. (A writer likes a coöperative subject, but it can be dispiriting to make a portrait in the shadow of a gigantic self-portrait.) He was not a "piss artist," he explained, "someone who can't get going without a load of beer, who's a drunk—overconfident and flushed. I can't bear that." He went on, "I know what I'm doing with it. And I can time it. It's a self-medicating thing." I took his point. Hitchens does drink a very great deal (and said of Mel Gibson's blood-alcohol level at the time of his recent Malibu arrest—0.12 per cent—"that's as sober as you'd ever want to be"). But he drinks like a Hemingway character: continually and to no apparent effect.

That evening at the guesthouse, Peter Berkowitz, the Straussian intellectual and Hoover Institution fellow, and Tod Lindberg, the editor of *Policy Review*, dropped by with family members. The back-yard pool was suddenly full of children. Someone had brought champagne, and Hitchens poured it with exaggerated disapproval. (A few years ago, he claimed that the four most overrated things in life were champagne, lobsters, anal sex, and picnics.) Hitchens went into the house and put on Bob Dylan's "Tryin' to Get to Heaven"; he stood in the doorway and sung quietly along. He quoted Philip Larkin on Dylan: a "cawing, derisive voice." He repeated Larkin's words a few times, approvingly. His daughter got out of the pool, and said, pleasantly, "Can we close the door, so nobody else has to hear this?"

She went back to her friends. "Look," Hitchens said happily. "They're waiting for us to die."

Hitchens and Blue flew back to Washington just after Labor Day. At the end of that week, in the Madison Hotel, Hitchens sat alongside William Kristol, the editor of the *Weekly Standard*, and others on a panel convened by the David Horowitz Freedom Center. Robert (Buzz) Patterson, the conservative author and former White House military aide, introduced the event, and was applauded for a passing dig at the A.C.L.U. Hitchens, whose remarks were delivered into a warm hum of approval—"too easy," he later said—described it as "a pleasure as well as a duty" to kill Islamic terrorists.

Horowitz has often spoken and written about his upbringing by Communist parents. Hitchens's response, years ago, was to ask, "Who cares about his pathetic family?" But Horowitz holds no grudge, and the two men talked in the bar afterward, with the rapport that comes from being the only people in a ten-block radius who could say they had read all three volumes of Isaac Deutscher's biography of Leon Trotsky. Horowitz asked about Hitchens's commitment to his Restoration Weekend, in Palm Beach, later in the year. Hitchens would never apologize for sharing a platform with anyone, but he wanted to know what Horowitz saw in Ann Coulter: Hadn't he noticed the creationism in "Godless"?

"I didn't read the Darwin pages," Horowitz admitted.

"It's nearly a third of the sodding book!" Hitchens said.

Hitchens had to be up early in the morning, and he began to make his way out. But a friend came up and asked him a favor, leading Hitchens to a group of young Horowitz fans. Hitchens sat down. "You really want to hear the most obscene joke in the world?" he asked them.

An hour later, Hitchens was at home, making a bacon sandwich. I asked him if he had felt a pang of envy when, in 2005, Michael Ignatieff, the author, public intellectual, and longtime U.K. resident, moved back to his native Canada to become a Liberal M.P.—and a likely future leader of his party. Hitchens replied, "Not a pang. A twinge." When he was a young man, Hitchens was once sounded out about standing for Parliament as a Labour candidate. He took another path, but in subsequent years has occasionally thought of the politician he did not become. And today in Britain the political furniture is arranged as he would like it to be; that is, with opposition to the Iraq intervention heard as loudly on the Conservative side as on the left, and—as he sees it—a Labour Government acting in accordance with the radical, humanist, internationalist idealism of his youth. Earlier this year, Hitchens had a private meeting with Prime Minister Tony Blair.

I asked Hitchens if he would accept a life peerage and a seat in the House of Lords. "It would be fantastically tempting," he said, showing more eagerness than I'd expected. "I think I couldn't do it, even though it's no longer hereditary. I couldn't quite see the term 'Lord Hitchens.' " He added, with some feeling, "That I never had the right to walk into Parliament is something I'll always be sorry about."

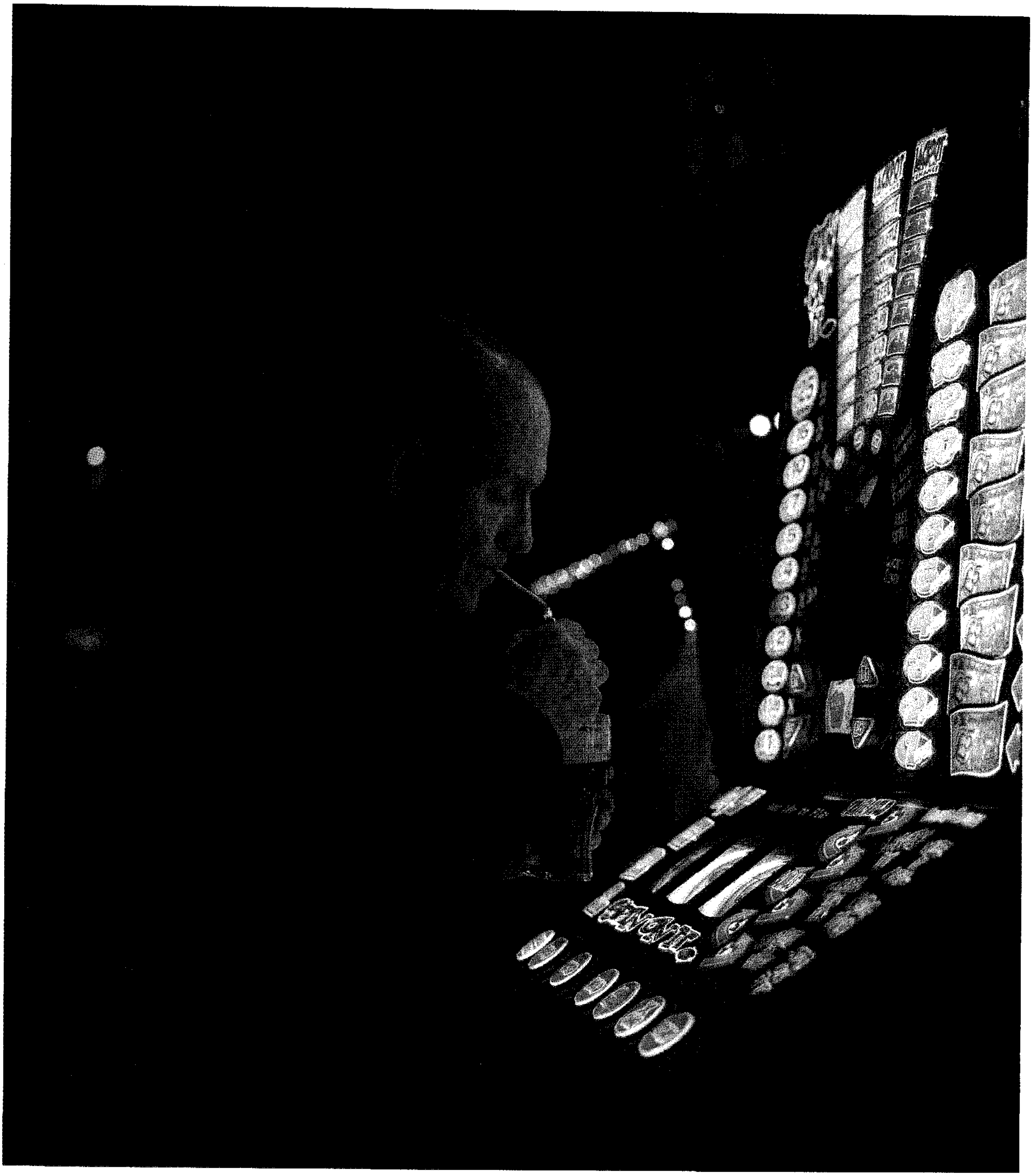
This year is the twenty-fifth anniversary of Hitchens's move to America. Barring a last-minute complication, this will also be the year he becomes a citizen. He began the process not long after the attacks of 2001. The paperwork is done, he has passed the exam, and he was interviewed in June.

I asked if he'd vote in November. "I'll *run* in November," he said. "Don't rule it out." He added, "I can't be President. So we can relax about that." ◆

FICTION

THE PHOTOGRAPH

BY RODDY DOYLE



Getting older wasn't too bad. The baldness suited Martin. Everyone said it. He'd had to change his trouser size from 34 to 36. It had been a bit of a shock, but it was kind of nice wearing loose trousers again, hitching them up when he stood up to go to the jacks, or whatever. He was fooling himself; he knew that. But that was the point—he was fooling himself. He'd put on weight but he felt a bit thinner.

There were other things, too, that had nothing to do with his body and aging. The kids getting older was one, and the freedom he'd kind of forgotten about. For years, if he stayed in bed in the morning, if he wanted to, it had to be carefully planned. Lizzie, his wife, had to be told. The kids had to be told, and nearly asked. It hadn't been worth it, the fuckin' palaver he'd had to go through. For years, all those years the kids were growing up, he'd been on call. A pal of his had used the phrase, on call. He'd been talking about his own life, but—there were four of them there that night in the local, sitting around one of the high tables—he'd been describing all their lives.

—I'm like a doctor without the fuckin' money, Noel had said.

They'd all smiled and nodded.

He'd loved it, mostly, the whole family/kids thing, and he'd ignored the throb above his left eye that had often felt like too much coffee or dehydration, too much or too little of something, that he thought now had probably been the pressure of that life. For years, the throb—the vein. Everything he'd done, everywhere he'd gone. Every minute had been counted and used. He had four children, and there were eleven years between the oldest and the youngest. It was over now—it seemed to be over—and the throb had gone away.

It had taken a while. He'd be wide awake early on Saturday, with nothing to do. He'd drive down to the recycling center in Coolock with five empty bottles and a cardboard box. He'd shove the box in on top of the other boxes and newspapers and he'd remember holding up one of the kids, usually the little girl, so she could reach the slot the cardboard was pushed into. He'd wonder what the fuck he was doing up and out of the house when he could have been at home in bed. He'd drive out to Howth and watch other people buying fish. He'd feel useful while he was driving. There were no kids in the back, only more cars behind him in the rearview mirror. It took him a good while to stop. Well over a year. He was driving long after the kids stopped needing him. But he did stop. He could relax now without thinking too much about it.

CHRIS STEELE-PERKINS (2002)/MAGNUM

He wasn't on call anymore, and Noel was dead.

He missed the kids. Two of them still lived at home. They smiled when they saw him. They sometimes stayed at the table for a few minutes after they'd finished eating, and they'd chat. They'd talk more to Lizzie than to him, but it was easy enough; it was nice. They'd been wise that way, him and Lizzie. They'd got through the teen years without too much grief. There'd been no drug habits or pregnancies, not too much puking and far less screaming than they'd heard coming from some of the other houses on the road. They were great kids. He missed them. If he thought of it, the fact that he didn't have children anymore—if he'd been an actor, it was what he'd have done to make himself cry.

There was sex as well. That was a nice surprise. There'd always been sex, more or less, in among the nappies and the Calpol and schoolbooks. They'd never really stopped fancying each other. But the big surprise was some of the stuff they'd got up to since the kids had stopped being kids. Without any announcement or decision. She bit one of his nipples one night, and she'd never done that before. It hurt but, fuck, it woke him up. And he'd made her come—this was a different night—just by talking to her. So she'd said, anyway. She was hanging on to him and crying before he really knew what was going on. He just thought it was a bit of gas, whispering into her ear. He even put on an American accent, all that pussy and cock palaver. He was still just getting the hang of it, deciding what part of the States he was from, when she came. He'd never fuckin' forget it.

And there were other women. Women liked mature men. He'd read that somewhere, in a waiting room somewhere—the dentist or the doctor. Or it was just one of the things you grew up with. Women went for older men. He'd never believed it. Even when he changed it a bit, to some women, and some older men. He'd always thought it was a load of bollix. He still thought that, even more since he'd started noticing women looking at him, kind of giving him the eye. Not young ones—he didn't think he could have coped with that, smiling back at some gorgeous monster less than half his age. No, it was mature women, older women—some older women. One or two of them. There was a woman from up the road who always waved at him—she lived on the other side, nearer the shops—and she looked great from that distance. He'd looked up from the pile of newspapers in the SPAR one Sunday morning, and she'd been right beside him. He smelt her perfume, and she looked nice up close, too. She was dressed up a bit, in the old-fashioned Sunday way. And she blushed when she saw him.

—Hi.

—Hi.

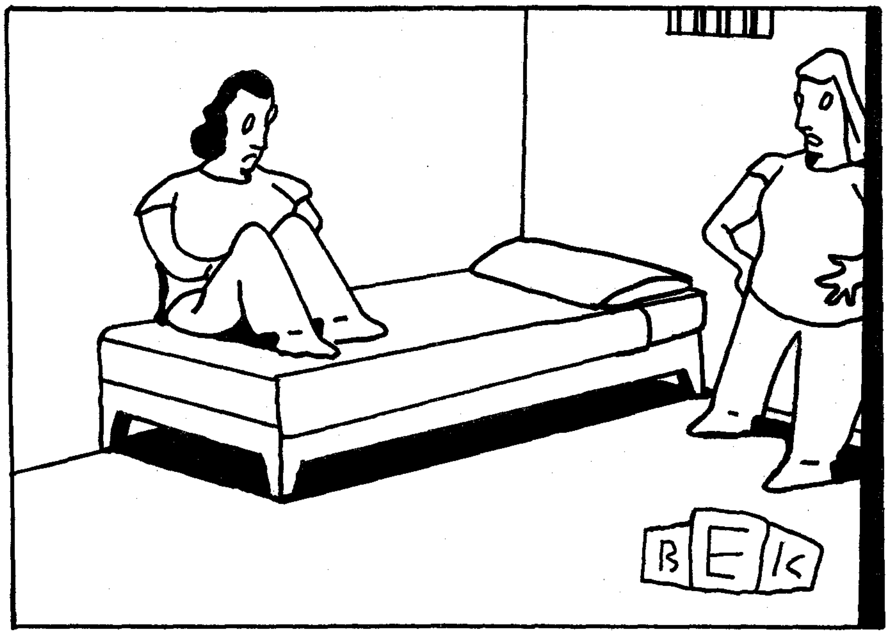
She looked a bit flustered.

—Great day.

—Lovely.

He loved that, thinking that, that he'd knocked her off course a bit, just by being there, older man himself, in the SPAR on a Sunday morning. He felt the heat in his own face. He bought his *Indo* and kind of drifted out of the shop, took his time. He hoped, half hoped, they'd walk back up the road together, and chat till they got to her place, and a little bit more at the gate, then he'd go on to his. But it didn't happen. He walked home alone, and she passed him in her car and she kept going, past her house. She must have been going somewhere, her ma's or somewhere. Her husband was driving.

It was fine. He wasn't interested in taking it further, and he didn't think he'd have had the guts. Anyway, another of his friends, Davie, had separated from his missis a few years back and he was living back home with his mother, the poor fucker, because he couldn't afford to do anything else. But he, Davie, went to a different pub on Sunday nights, where men and women like himself, unattached and out of practice, went. And, after a few months of this, he'd come up with Davie's Law: All women over the age of forty are



"I just think men find female homicidal maniacs very threatening."

mad. He'd announced it in the local, one of their Wednesday nights, and none of them had disagreed.

Martin was lucky, though. Lizzie was kind of sexy mad. The insanity suited her. She knew it, and that made it even better. He'd never have done anything to wreck it.

But it wasn't all great, the getting-older business—far from. He'd started grunting whenever he picked something up or bent down to tie his laces, or whatever. He hated it. He'd tell himself to stop. But he'd forget. It became natural. Pick the soap up in the shower—grunt. Start the lawnmower—grunt. He didn't have to grunt. He was well able to bend over and the rest of it. He asked the lads, and they all did it, too.

And there was the cancer. Not his. He'd never had it. His friend who'd died. Noel. That was cancer. Felt a bit short of breath. Went to the doctor. Straight up to Beaumont Hospital. Came out two days later with the news and the dates for his chemotherapy. He told them about it the day after that, in the local, sitting in all the smoke—this was a few months before the smoking ban.

Martin didn't smoke. He never had. Noel did. But he'd given them up a year or so before the cancer, or at least before he found out about it.

None of them said anything, for a bit. They waited for him to go on, to make it less terrible. Martin watched Davie put out his cigarette, crush it into the ashtray. He pushed away the last of the rising smoke with his hand.

—They say it's early enough, Noel said. With the chemo and that. They should be able to stop it.

And they'd watched him slowly die. Not slowly. Only now it seemed slow, start to end. But at the time he'd been fine—he'd looked fine. He'd lost the hair with the chemo, but he'd looked good. Into the second year, they'd all thought he was going to make it. But then it had really started. They'd had to visit his house. He sat there with his oxygen beside him, one of those cannister things. His eyes started to look huge and he struggled to get up when he was going to the door to say goodbye to them.

—Stay where you are. We're grand.

—No, no, I'll come out with yis.

It took him forever to get to the door. They waved at the gate, and smiled back in at him and his mad skeleton smile, his shirt way too big on him.

They got into the car. And then they spoke.

—He's not going to make it, is he?

—No.

Then nothing for a while.

—We'd better get going. He'll be wondering why we're not moving.

—Right. O.K.

Lizzie knew Noel wasn't well, and she asked Martin how he was every couple of days. She asked this time and he told her and he cried and she held his head. About a week after that, he went to the jacks and there was blood on the sides of the bowl when he stood up and turned to flush it. He'd pulled the handle before he properly knew: that was his blood. He said nothing. There was no blood the next time, or the time after that. But it was back the next time; it looked strange on the toilet paper, too red. He had to phone in sick and stay home, because he was getting cramps and sweating like a madman. He told Lizzie. He went back to bed. She sat beside him.

—Blood?

—Yeah, he said.

—Jesus. Sore?

—Kind of, he said. Uncomfortable.

—I'll phone the doctor's, she said.

She looked at her watch.

—He should be still there.

—No, he said.

—Yes.

—O.K., he said.

He had to get up again. He had to go back to the jacks.

—You poor thing, she said.

He went past her.

—Sorry, he said.

He heard her at the toilet door, waiting. He wished she'd go away.

It wasn't cancer. He'd ended up going to a specialist and he had a colonoscopy three weeks later, a fibre-optic camera all the way to his appendix. He lay down on the bed thing, turned on his left side, like he was told, and the specialist gave him the jab, a needle in the arm. It was over when he woke up, and he was in a different room. They gave him toast and tea and the specialist was suddenly there, beside him—Martin was still a bit dopey—and told him that he had diverticular disease. The specialist wrote it down on a piece of paper, said something about looking it up on the Net, and then he went back behind the screen and Martin didn't see him again.

He Googled it when he got home, and for a few stupid minutes he wished he had cancer. It was fuckin' disgusting.

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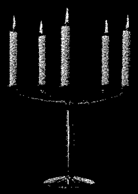
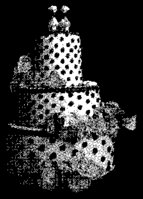
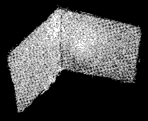
Jan Jansen Shoes $175



Marcel Wanders Candleabra $199



"Auntie's Cakes" pie $29



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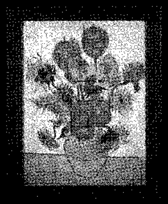
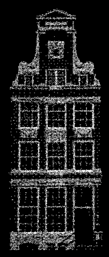
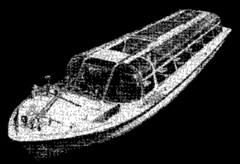


Van Gogh Museum visit $13



Amsterdam Canal House $950,000

Bunch of 10 tulips $3



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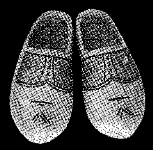

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Diverticula are pockets that develop in the colon wall. He could feel his own colon; he could feel it throbbing, coiling. He got up, and sat down again. Pain, chills, fever, change in bowel habits. His finger was on the screen, under each word. Perforation, abscess or fistula formation. He found a dictionary in his daughter's room and looked up abscess. He'd never been sure what an abscess actually was, some kind of spectacular toothache. A swollen area within body tissue, containing an accumulation of pus. He put the dictionary back on her desk. He sat on her bed and ate the Mars bar he'd found beside the dictionary. He didn't look up fistula. It could wait. He knew enough.

He couldn't tell anyone. He couldn't tell Lizzie. She'd never let him touch her again. Or she would and he'd see it, the pity and revulsion.

Pus.

Stand well back, lads, the next time I fart. He could make a joke of it. He was good at that. It was part of the way they were, making a laugh out of everything. But they'd still all be disgusted.

Why him—why Martin? What had he done to deserve perforations and pus? Cancer was dignified, something nearly to be proud of—a fuckin' achievement, compared to this. What the fuck was a fistula formation? He still didn't look it up.

Noel was in the hospice. He was too weak for home. They went in to see him one Sunday afternoon, one of the last summer days. It was a nice room. The window was open. Martin could smell flowers, hear birds. Noel sat on the side of his bed. His head was bent and everything he said came through the oxygen mask. He sounded high-pitched, like his voice had never broken, like every bit of each word was being pulled out of him. They chatted about the usual, the football and that. They laughed more than they had to, and then the laughter became more even and Martin thought he'd tell them about the diverticular thing. But Noel got in there first.

—Look it, he said.

They said nothing. They waited.

—I'm fighting this, he said.

They waited.

—Yis know that, he said. But, in case.

They watched him swallow air and keep it.

—Yis've been. Great friends, he said. I just wanted. To say that. In case. You know.

—Works both ways, brother, said Davie.

—You'll be grand, Noel.

—Just, wanted. To say it.

He died four days after.

The trick was the diet. As far as he could see, from what he'd read on Google. It wasn't really a disease. It was more like waiting to be a disease. Most people who had it didn't even know. Plenty of fresh stuff, vegetables and that. No nuts or big seeds, nothing that might block one of the pockets on his colon.

For fuck sake.

My arse is a time bomb, lads. He could hear himself saying it. Making small of it. Maybe when they were having a pint after the funeral. He could see it and hear it. The questions, the laughter.

He told Lizzie.

He actually blamed Lizzie, but only for a little while. It was the food she'd been giving him for the past twenty-nine years. She'd been killing him. But he didn't really think that. He told her the same day Noel died. He should have waited—he thought that later. He shouldn't have jumped in with his own bad news. He knew he was doing it. Throwing himself into poor Noel's grave. But he did it.

—I've a thing called diverticular disease.

He stopped himself from adding "myself." I've a thing called diverticular disease myself. He didn't go that far—I've got cancer, too. He didn't. But it sat there. He knew it. On the kitchen table.

Disease.

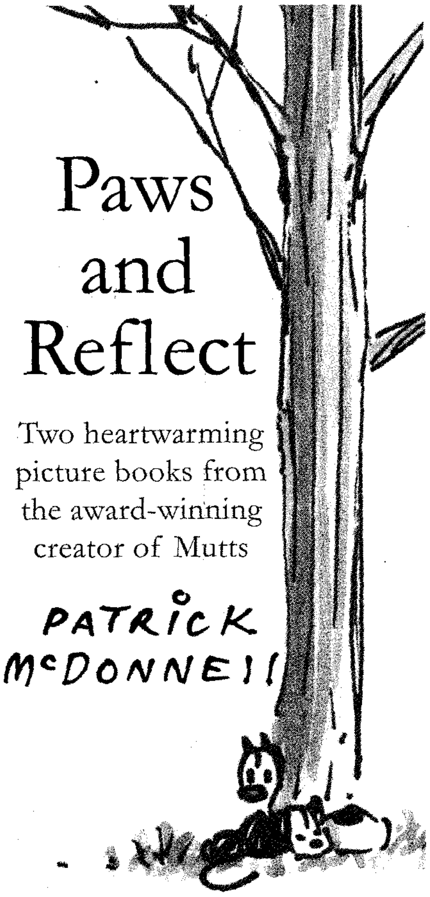
He told her what it was, as far as he understood it.

—I can swing between constipation and diarrhea. Or, if one of the yokes gets blocked . . .

He was stuck now. He had to go on. She was looking straight at him.

—If the fecal matter gets caught in one of them, he said. One of the pockets or pouches, like. It'll become inflamed. Even perforated.

Her hand went to her mouth.



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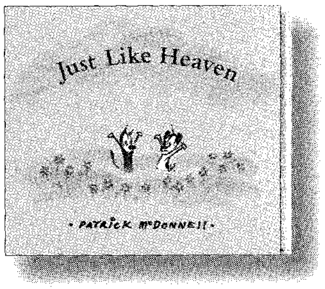

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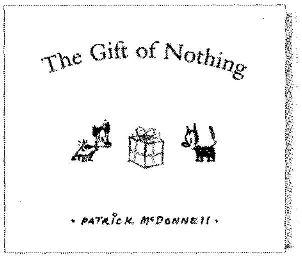

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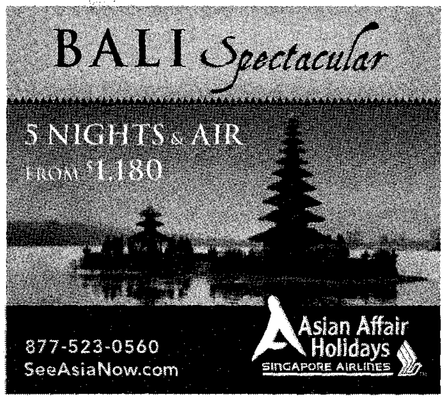

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—If I'm not careful, he told her. They'll have to take out my colon.

—All of it?

—Most of it.

He wasn't sure. He hadn't really read that far.

—But that's only if I'm not careful.

—What d'you mean, careful? she said.

—About my diet and that, he said.

—What's wrong with it?

—Nothing.

He was leaning over, taking the big words back off the table. Why hadn't he kept his fuckin' mouth shut?

—Will you have to become a vegetarian or something? she said.

—No, he said. I don't think so. But I'll have to eat vegetables.

—You do already.

—I know.

Just don't boil them to fuck.

He didn't say it. He didn't even think it, really.

He shrugged.

—It's just . . . Anyway. Now you know.

They sat at the table. He thought about Noel.

They walked up to the church together, him and Lizzie; it was no distance from the house. There was a big crowd, waiting on the steps and on the bits of grass, out onto the street.

—That's good, he said to Lizzie.

He wasn't sure why. A bit of a comfort for Noel's wife and kids, who'd be arriving soon in the black cars, with the hearse. It was what he'd have thought. My husband was popular. All these people knew my father. Familiar faces. Unfamiliar faces. He'd had a big, full life.

Martin had bought a new shirt, to go with his jacket. It was a bit tight on him, but grand as long as he kept the jacket on. He'd be losing weight soon. The whole new regime. Fruit, grains. The fresh veg. Legumes. Another of the words he'd had to find in the dictionary. Peas, beans. Health and boredom.

He hadn't slept. Not since Noel had died. Since a good bit before, actually. He'd jump awake before he was really asleep. Afraid to sleep. Afraid of falling. His skin was dry. He saw that when he brought his face up to the mirror. Dry skin all over his face. Especially across his forehead and at the sides of his nose. And spots. He could feel them, threatening, angry, right over his forehead. He looked desperate.

—Stress, said Lizzie.

He nodded.

—Grief.

—He's only dead a few days, he said.

—You've known for two years, she said back.

She was right. It made sense. The death, the news, hadn't done anything. He'd known what it was when the phone rang. He'd been waiting.

The sleep was the worst part. One good night would have made the difference, would have put whatever was missing back under his skin. That was how he felt, what he nearly believed. The night before, Lizzie had handed him a bottle of Benylin, the cough mixture, half empty and sticky. He hadn't seen Benylin since the kids had grown up.

—Take a mouthful of that.

He looked at it.

—What's the best-before date? he said. It must be fuckin' ancient.

—Never mind the date, she said. If it pours out, it's grand.

He got the lid off. He filled his mouth. He'd always liked the taste of it. He swallowed.

—Here, she said.

He gave her the bottle. She put it to her mouth and swallowed the rest.

—Good night, she said.

—Good night.

He conked out but he was awake again at half-three. Wide awake. Looking at the ceiling becoming brighter, the big swinging cobweb he always meant to get at with the brush. He got up. Had his breakfast. His new breakfast—a sliced banana, a sliced pear. Yum fuckin' yum. It was all right, though, and good for him. He was hungry again by the time the rest of them got up.

They stood at the church gate and chatted a bit as they waited for the hearse. It was weird, like pretending they weren't there for the funeral.

—Here they come.

The hearse came off the road and up past them to the front of the church. They blessed themselves. The coffin in there—Noel. It didn't seem real. And the black cars after the hearse. Two of them. The wife, the kids, a boyfriend; his sisters, the brother from Australia. They watched as they all got out of the cars and the undertaker's men took the coffin from the back of the hearse and carried it into the church.

He and Lizzie went about halfway up the aisle, not too near, not too far back. Martin hadn't been in the church in years. But he remembered it exactly, how cold it always was. How far down his knees would have to go before they landed on the padding that ran under the back of the seat in front of him, when the priest told them to kneel. How Jesus in the Stations of the Cross looked a bit like Keith Richards. He was going to show Lizzie, to remind her.

But he heard the gasp. That was what it sounded like, the whole place gasping, softly, everybody there. He looked. Noel's wife was walking away from the coffin. She'd put a framed photograph on top of it.

Noel. That was what the gasp was for. Noel, twenty-five years before.

—Jesus. Look at that.

He'd forgotten. He'd forgotten that Noel used to look like that. A big man with a big grin and a big collar on his red shirt. A big handsome man. A young man, looking back at the camera. Right into his future.

He'd forgotten. The last two years, they'd watched Noel get smaller. And, in the last months, the smaller version became the man. The man Martin hoped he wasn't talking to for the last time. He'd looked at him carefully, already remembering, storing him away. And he'd forgotten about the real man. The full man. But there he was now, on the coffin.

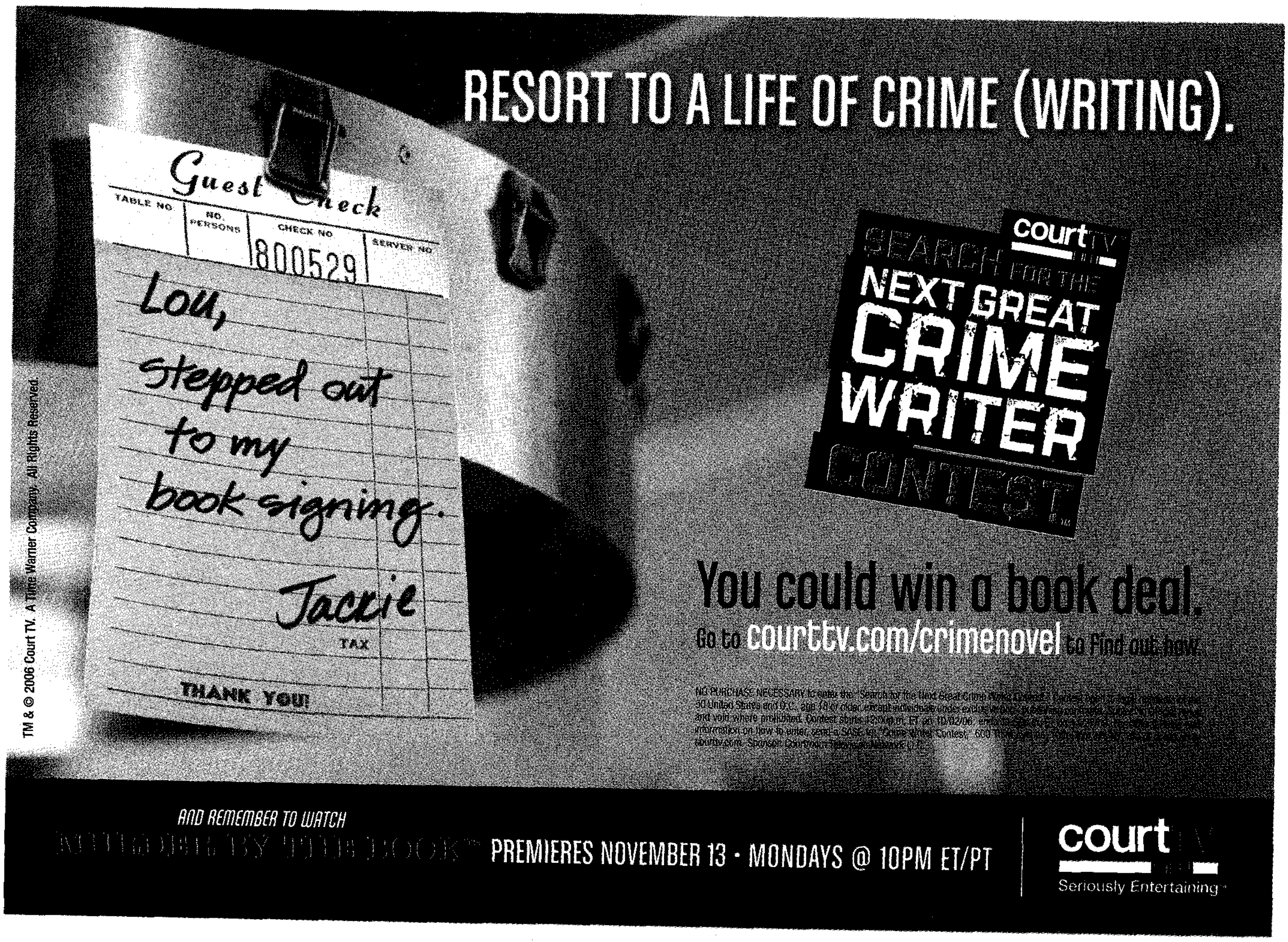
It should have been heartbreaking. And it was. Seeing the faded color, the big collar. He felt guilty. He'd let himself forget. He'd let the sick man become the man. He'd forgotten why Noel had been Noel, why they'd been friends. But there was more—the guilt didn't settle. He could feel it, and hear. The gasp had become whispers. The photograph. Noel's wife—Barbara—her putting the picture there, on the coffin, that was brilliant. And brave—going up there, letting the wood of the frame clatter against the coffin lid. Keeping her hands steady. She was even smiling when she came back and sat down.

Martin could see Davie in front of him, and the other men he knew and liked, all looking at each other, over other people's heads, smiling. Sad and good had become the same thing. Martin wanted to talk. He wanted to laugh. He wanted to stop being the man with diverticular disease. He felt Lizzie beside him. He nudged her knee with his. She nudged back.

The priest was walking over to the platform beside the altar, and the microphone. Martin heard a soft voice somewhere behind him, a man.

—Here goes.

They stood. ♦



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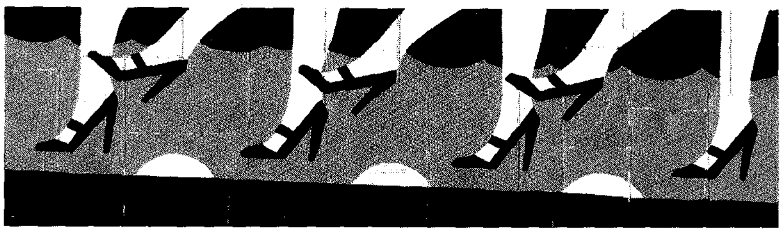

BOOKS

THE SHARPENED QUILL

Was Thomas Paine too much of a freethinker for the country he helped free?

BY JILL LEPORE

In the winter of 1776, John Adams read "Common Sense," an anonymous, fanatical, and brutally brilliant seventy-seven-page pamphlet that would convince the American people of what more than a decade of taxes and nearly a year of war had not: that it was nothing less than their destiny to declare independence from Britain. "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind" was its astonishing and inspiring claim about the fate of thirteen infant colonies on the edge of the world. "The sun never shone on a cause of greater worth. 'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province, or a kingdom; but of a continent—of at least one-eighth part of the habitable globe. 'Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now." Whether these words were preposterous or prophetic no one could say for sure, but everyone wondered: Who could have written such stirring stuff?

"People Speak of it in rapturous praise," a friend wrote Adams. "Some make Dr. Franklin the Author," another hinted. "I think I see strong marks of *your pen* in it," speculated a third. More miffed than flattered, Adams admitted to his wife, Abigail, "I could not have written any Thing in so manly and striking a style." Who, then? Adams found out: "His Name is Paine."

Thomas Pain was born in Thetford, England, in 1737 (he added the "e" later, and was called "Tom" only by his enemies), the son of a Quaker artisan who sewed the bones of whales into stays for ladies' corsets. He left the local grammar school at the age of twelve, to serve as his father's apprentice. At twenty, he went to sea, on a privateer. In 1759, he opened his own stay-making shop and married a servant girl, but the next year both she and their child died in childbirth. For a decade, Pain struggled to make a life for himself. He taught school, collected taxes, and, in 1771, married a grocer's daughter. Three years later, he was fired from his job with the excise office, his unhappy and childless second marriage fell apart, and everything he owned was sold at auction to pay off his debts. At the age of thirty-seven, Thomas Pain was ruined. He therefore did what every ruined Englishman did, if he possibly could: he sailed to America. Sickened with typhus during the journey, Pain arrived in Philadelphia in December, 1774, so weak that he had to be carried off the ship. What saved his life was a letter found in his pocket: "The bearer Mr Thomas Pain is very well recommended to me as an ingenious worthy young man." It was signed by Benjamin Franklin. It was better than a bag of gold.

How an unknown and uneducated Englishman who had been in the colonies for little more than a year came to write the most influential essay of the American Revolution—no matter that he had once caught Franklin's eye during a chance meeting in London—is a mystery not easily solved. Lockean liberalism, classical republicanism, and Leveller radicalism all can be found in Paine's work, though how much he read Locke, or anyone else, is probably impossible to discover. His love for equality has been traced to Quakerism, his hatred of injustice to growing up next door to a gallows. Good guesses, but guesses all the same. In a rewarding new biography, "Thomas Paine: Enlightenment, Revolution, and the Birth of Modern Nations" (Viking; $27.95), Craig Nelson argues that Paine soaked up the ideas of the Enlightenment, especially Newtonian rationalism, during the years he spent in London, and that may be the best explanation anyone ever gets.

"I offer nothing more than simple facts, plain arguments, and common sense," Paine wrote, but this was coyness itself: "Common Sense" stood every argument against American independence on its head. "There is something very absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island," he insisted. As to the colonies' dependence on England, "We may as well assert that because a child has thrived upon milk, that it is never to have meat." And hereditary monarchy? "Nature disapproves it, otherwise she would not so frequently turn it into ridicule by giving mankind an *ass for a lion.*"

Adams, who had been the colonies' most ardent advocate for independence, refused to accept that Paine deserved any credit for "Common Sense." "He is a keen Writer," Adams granted, but he'd offered nothing more than "a tolerable Summary of the Arguments which I had been repeating again and again in Congress for nine months." The longer John Adams lived, the more he hated Thomas Paine, and the more worthless he considered that seventy-seven-page pamphlet. By the end of his life, the ill-tempered former President would call "Common Sense" "a poor, ignorant, Malicious, short-sighted, Crapulous Mass."

Thomas Paine is, at best, a lesser Founder. In the comic-book version of history that serves as our national heritage, where the Founding Fathers are like the Hanna-Barbera Super Friends, Paine is Aquaman to Washington's Superman and Jefferson's Batman; we never find out how he got his superpowers, and he only shows up when they need someone who can swim. For all that, Paine's

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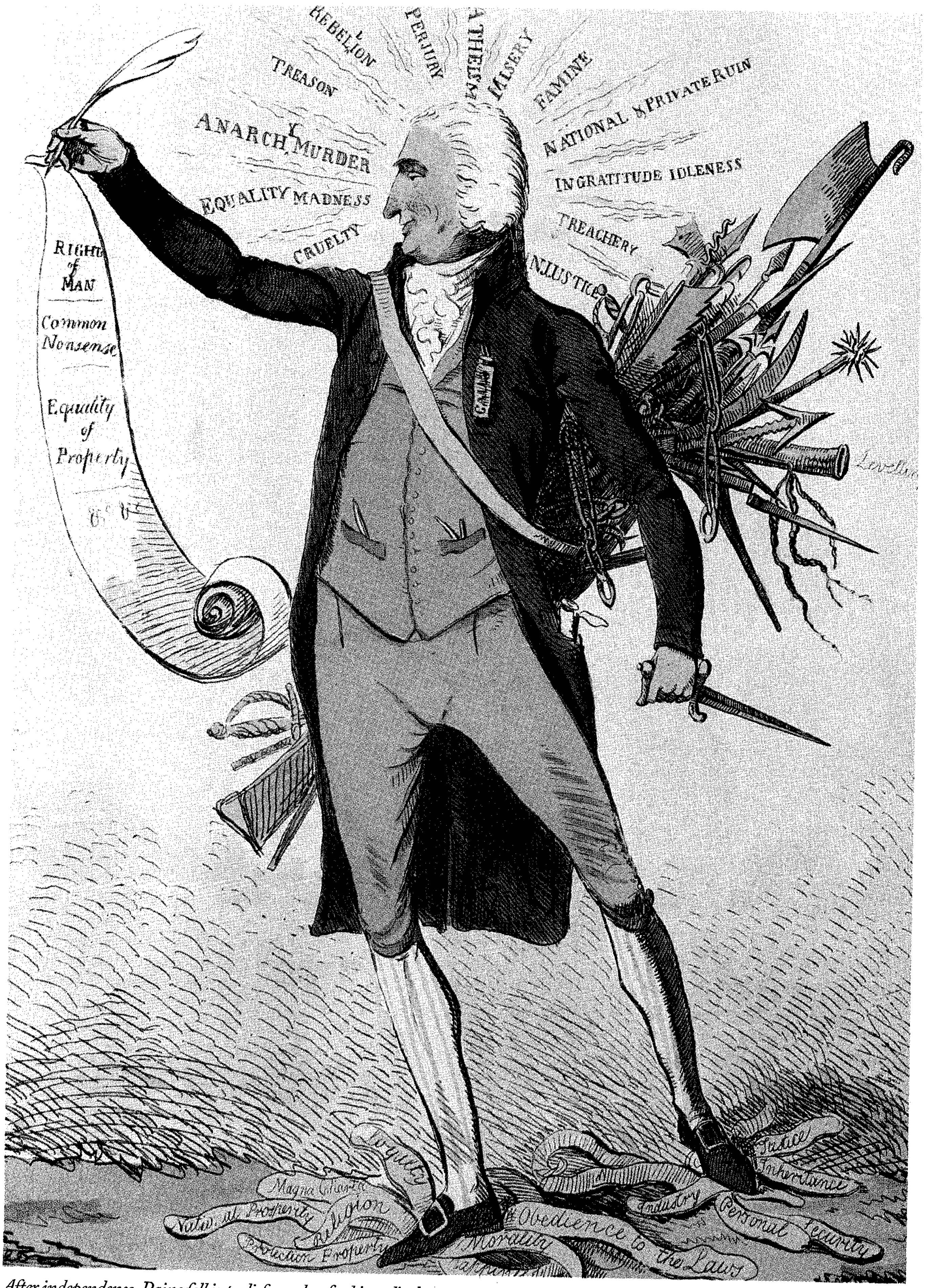
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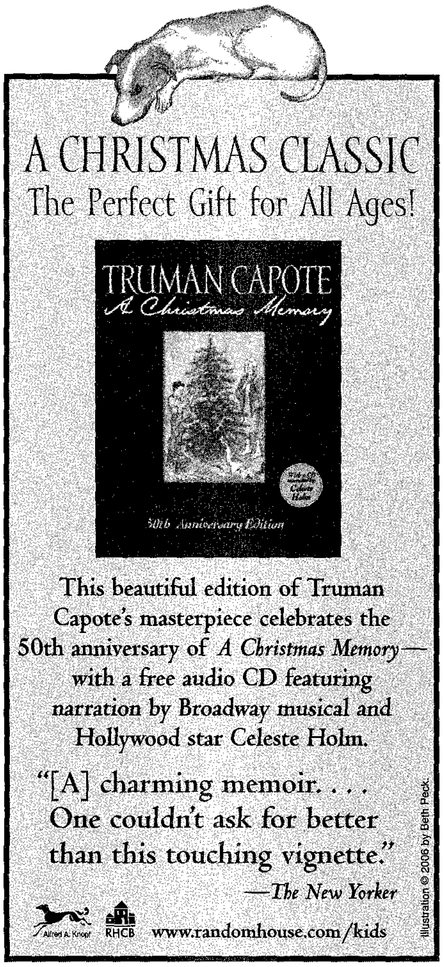
After independence, Paine fell into disfavor less for his radical arguments than for having addressed them to a popular audience.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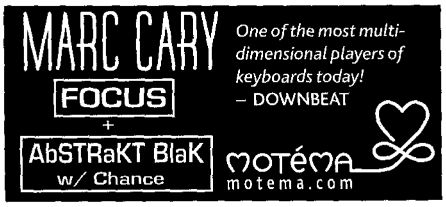
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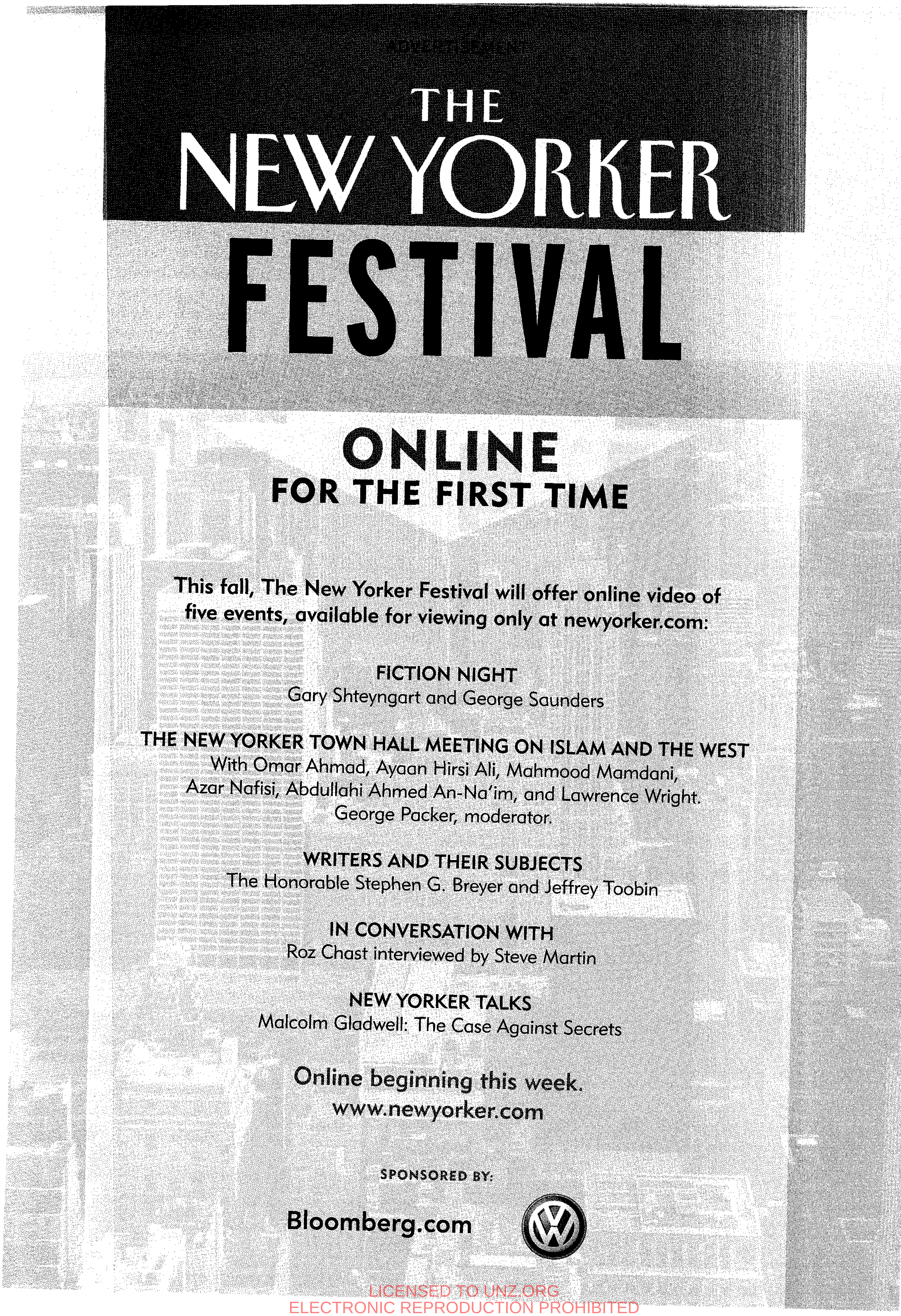
contributions to the nation's founding would be hard to overstate. "Common Sense" made it possible to declare independence. "Without the pen of the author of 'Common Sense,' the sword of Washington would have been raised in vain," Adams himself wrote. But Paine lifted his sword, too, and emptied his purse. Despite his poverty—he was by far the poorest of the Founders—he donated his share of the profits from "Common Sense" to buy supplies for the Continental Army, in which he also served. His chief contribution to the war was a series of dispatches known as "The American Crisis," and printed in newspapers throughout the states. He wrote the first of them by the light of a campfire during Washington's desperate retreat across New Jersey, in December, 1776. Getting ready to cross the frozen Delaware River—at night, in a blizzard—to launch a surprise attack on Trenton, Washington ordered Paine's words read to his exhausted, frostbitten troops: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it *now*, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph." The next morning, the Continentals fought to a stunning, pivotal victory.

It's hard to believe that anyone thought Adams could have written such lines. Paine wrote like no one else: he wrote for everyone. "As it is my design to make those that can scarcely read understand," he explained, "I shall therefore avoid every literary ornament and put it in language as plain as the alphabet." As a journalist, Paine wrote vigorously, and he wrote often, penning, in 1776, a series of essays in the *Pennsylvania Journal* refuting critiques of "Common Sense." He also served as the editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*. "A magazine," Paine believed, "is the nursery of genius."

So gripping was Paine's prose, and so vast was its reach, that Adams once complained to Jefferson, "History is to ascribe the American Revolution to Thomas Paine." But history has not been kind to Paine, who forfeited his chance to glorify his role, or at least to document it: when, at the end of the war, Congress asked him to write the history of the Revolution, he declined. And the person who did write that history, Adams's friend the Massachusetts poet and playwright Mercy Otis Warren, relegated Paine to a footnote—literally—in her magisterial three-volume "History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution" (1805). By the time Paine died, in 1809, all the surviving Founders had renounced him. (Jefferson even refused to allow his correspondence with Paine to be printed. "No, my dear sir, not for this world," he told an inquirer. "Into what a hornet's nest would it thrust my head!") And almost no one showed up to see him buried. As Paul Collins observes in "The Trouble with Tom: The Strange Afterlife and Times of Thomas Paine" (Bloomsbury; $24.95), "There were twenty thousand mourners at Franklin's funeral. Tom Paine's had six."

Disavowed by his contemporaries, Paine left little behind in his own defense; the bulk of his papers, including notes for an autobiography, were destroyed in a fire. Even his bones have been lost. (The sorry story of those bones—stolen, stashed, smashed, and, in the end, probably thrown out with the rubbish—is the subject of Collins's transatlantic quest.) Paine enjoyed a brief revival in the nineteen-forties, after F.D.R. quoted "The American Crisis"—"These are the times that try men's souls"—in a fireside chat in 1942, three months after the attack on Pearl Harbor; and an excellent two-volume set, "The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine," edited by Philip Foner, was published in 1945. But Paine has never much enjoyed the esteem of academics, who, on the whole, have shared John Adams's view of him, whatever the rest of America might think. In a review of "The Complete Writings" in *The Nation* in 1946, the eminent early-Americanist Perry Miller sneered, "The price of popularizing for contemporaries is temporary popularity." In 1980, Ronald Reagan inaugurated a second Paine revival when, accepting the Republican Party nomination for President, he quoted "Common Sense": "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." In the wake of that revival, the Princeton historian Sean Wilentz agreed with Miller's assessment; in *The New Republic* in 1995, Wilentz called Paine "hopelessly naïve." Paine emerges in most academic



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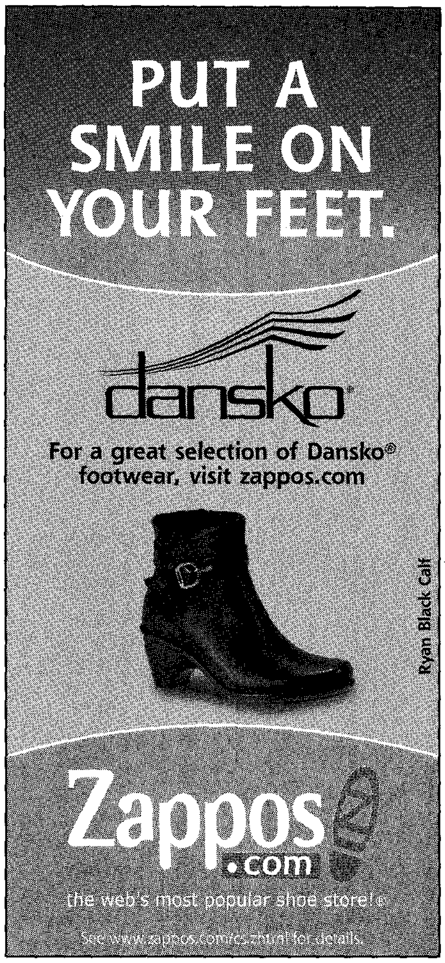
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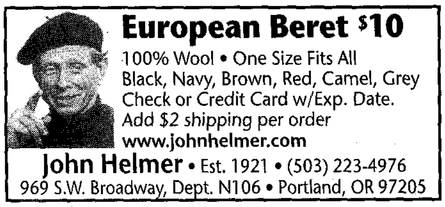
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accounts as a kind of idiot savant; savvy about adjectives but idiotic about politics. "Common Sense" is "a work of genius," Bernard Bailyn concluded, but, next to men like Adams, Jefferson, and Madison, Paine was "an ignoramus."

Thomas Paine left the United States in 1787. "Where liberty is, there is my country," Franklin once said, to which Paine replied, "Where liberty is not, there is my country." In England in 1791, he wrote the first part of "The Rights of Man," a work he considered an English version of "Common Sense." Defending the French Revolution from English critics, he argued that France had "outgrown the baby clothes of *count* and *duke*, and breeched itself in manhood." Americans had weaned themselves of milk, and the French had put on pants; now it was time for the British to grow beards. "It is an age of revolutions, in which every thing may be looked for." The next year, Paine wrote "Rights of Man, Part the Second," his most important statement of political principles, in which he explained and insisted on natural rights, equality, and popular sovereignty. He went further: "When, in countries that are called civilized, we see age going to the work-house and youth to the gallows, something must be wrong in the system of government." By way of remedy, Paine proposed the framework for a welfare state, providing tax tables calculated down to the last shilling.

The first part of "Rights of Man" sold fifty thousand copies in just three months. The second part was outsold only by the Bible. But British conservatives didn't want to follow France, especially as the news from Paris became more gruesome. Paine was charged with seditious libel, and everywhere his ideas were suppressed and his followers persecuted. "I am for equality. Why, no kings!" one Londoner shouted in a coffeehouse, and was promptly sent to prison for a year and a half. Meanwhile, William Pitt's government hired hack writers to conduct a smear campaign in which it was asserted, among other things, that Paine had committed fraud, defrauded his creditors, caused his first wife's death by beating her while she was pregnant, and abused his second wife almost as badly, except that she wasn't really his wife, because he never consummated that marriage, preferring to have sex with cats. Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, eat your hearts out.

"It is earnestly recommended to Mad Tom that he should embark for France and there be naturalized into the regular confusion of democracy," the London *Times* urged. In September, 1792, that's just what Paine did, fleeing to Paris, where he had already been elected a member of the National Assembly, in honor of his authorship of "Rights of Man." In France, he faltered and fell, not least because he spoke almost no French but mostly because he argued against executing Louis XVI, suggesting, instead, that he be exiled to the United States, where "he may learn, from the constant aspect of public prosperity, that the true system of government consists not in kings, but in fair, equal, and honourable representation."

Back in England, Paine's trial for "Rights of Man" went on without him; he was found guilty, and outlawed. "If the French kill their King, it will be a signal for my departure," Paine had pledged before he left for France, but now he had no choice: not only could he not return to England; he couldn't venture an Atlantic crossing to the United States, for fear of being captured by a British warship. Instead, he stayed in his rooms in Paris, and waited for the worst. As the Reign of Terror unfolded, he drafted the first part of "The Age of Reason." In December, 1793, when the police knocked at his door, he handed a stash of papers to his friend the American poet and statesman Joel Barlow. Barlow carried the manuscript to the printers; the police carried Paine to an eight-by-ten cell on the ground floor of a prison that had once been a palace. There he would write most of the second part of "The Age of Reason" as he watched other inmates go daily to their deaths. (In six weeks in the summer of 1794, more than thirteen hundred people were executed.)

When the United States government failed to secure his release, Paine at first despaired. Then he raged, writing to the American Ambassador, James Monroe, "I should be tempted to curse the day I knew America. By contributing to her liberty I have lost my own." Finally, after ten months, he was freed. But he left prison an invalid. Ravaged by typhus, gout, recurring fevers, and a suppurating wound on his belly, he never fully recovered. He convalesced at Monroe's home in Paris and, for years, at the homes of a succession of supporters. After Jefferson defeated Adams in the election of 1800, the new President invited Paine to return to the United States. He sailed in 1802.

"The questions central to an understanding of Paine's career do not lend themselves to exploration within the confines of conventional biography," Eric Foner observed in 1976, in "Tom Paine and Revolutionary America." No argument there. What with the burned papers, the lost bones, and Paine's role in three revolutions, not to mention tabloid allegations of wife-beating, it's hard to know how to write about Paine. Three new books wrestle with what has come to be called "The Problem with Paine." Collins's "The Trouble with Tom," an entertaining romp, belongs to an emerging genre of popular history that might be called necro-tourism: Tom Paine's bones, Einstein's brain, Houdini's hands. Paine's strange fate in American cultural memory is the subject of Harvey J. Kaye's deeply researched and revealing "Thomas Paine and the Promise of America" (Hill & Wang; $25). Nelson's "Thomas Paine" is the most conventionally biographical, though it's as much a primer on the Enlightenment as it is the story of the staymaker from Thetford—and all the better for it.

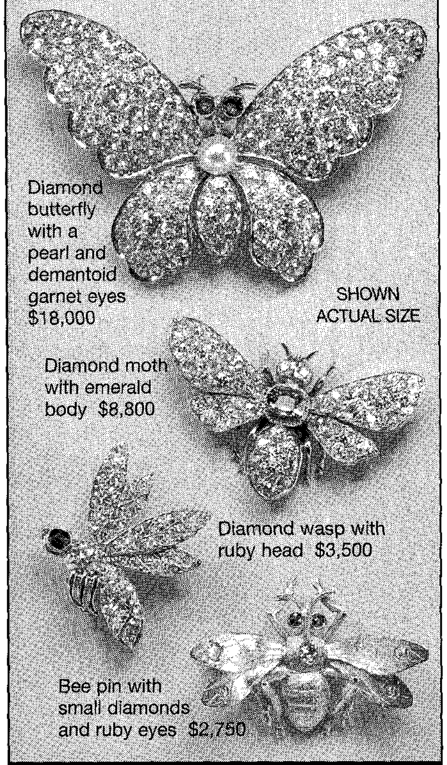
Kaye calls Paine "the greatest radical of a radical age," Collins dubs him "a walking revolution," Nelson sums him up as "Benjamin Franklin unleashed," and although I always thought that Franklin was Franklin unleashed, all of them are right. But none of them explain Paine's recent resurrection. Kaye, tracing Paine's influence on everyone from Abraham Lincoln (who admired Paine's style) to William Lloyd Garrison (who was accused of wanting to "out-Paine Tom Paine") and Walt Whitman (who, Kaye says, "longed to be Paine"), attributes Paine's popularity in the past two decades to the purity of his ideals, including a record on slavery that sets him apart from the rest of the Founders: Paine neither owned slaves nor profited from the slave trade and, in 1774, wrote an impassioned anti-slavery essay. Kaye concludes, "We find no Founder more committed to the progress of freedom, equality, and democracy than Paine."

True enough. But Americans' fresh embrace of Paine can also be attributed to our having forgotten the very thing about him that contributed most to his obscurity in the first place: his uncompromising condemnation of all the world's religions. In "The Age of Reason," published in 1794 and 1795, Paine wrote, "All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit." Theodore Roosevelt once called Paine a "filthy little atheist," but Paine did believe in God; he just didn't believe in the Bible or the Koran or the Torah; these he considered hearsay, lies, fables, and frauds that served to wreak havoc with humanity while hiding the beauty of God's creation, the evidence for which was everywhere obvious in "the universe we behold." In "The Age of Reason," Paine offered his own creed:

> I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.
>
> I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy.
>
> But . . . I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish Church, by the Roman Church, by the Greek Church, by the Turkish Church, by the Protestant Church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.

"Paine's religious opinions were those of three-fourths of the men of letters of the last age," Joel Barlow observed, probably overstating the case only slightly. Paine's views were hardly original; what was new was his audience. While other Enlightenment writers wrote for one another, Paine wrote, as always, for everyone. His contemporaries believed that radical philosophical speculation—especially critiques of religion—was to be shared only with men of education (and, it was assumed, judgment). The poor could not be trusted with such notions; freed of church-based morality, they would run amok. Paine disagreed, profoundly. To say that he was vilified for doing this is to miss the point. He was destroyed.

Mark Twain once said, "It took a brave man before the Civil War to confess he had read 'The Age of Reason.'" But that didn't mean it wasn't read. In 1797 alone, a single Philadelphia printer sold a hundred thousand copies. In Brit-



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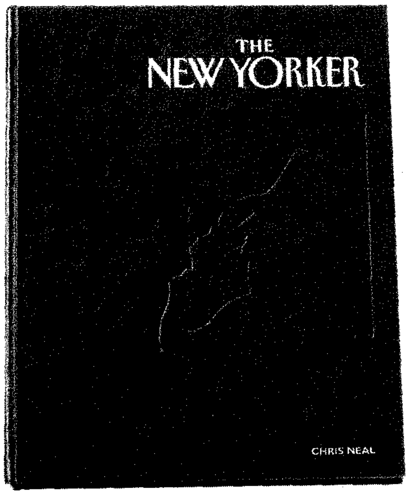

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ain, sales of "The Age of Reason" outpaced even those of "Rights of Man," though, since it was banned as blasphemous, it's impossible to know how many copies were sold. The London printer Richard Carlile, who called his bookstore the Temple of Reason, was fined a thousand pounds for publishing it, and sentenced to two years in jail. (During an earlier trial on similar charges, Carlile had read aloud from "Rights of Man," a ploy that allowed him to publish it again, as a courtroom transcript.) After Carlile's wife fell into the trap of selling "The Age of Reason" to a government agent posing as a bookstore browser, she—and her newborn baby—followed her husband to prison. Eventually, in order to avoid exposing anyone inside the bookstore to further prosecution, there appeared in the Temple of Reason an "invisible shopman," a machine into which customers could drop coins and take out a book, about which Collins writes, "It is sobering to think that the freedom of the press once depended upon a mechanism now used to vend Mars bars."

But "The Age of Reason" cost Paine dearly. He lost, among other things, the friendship of Samuel Adams, who seethed, "Do you think that your pen, or the pen of any other man, can unchristianize the mass of our citizens?" Even before Paine returned to the United States, in 1802, Federalists used him as a weapon against Jefferson, damning the "two Toms" as infidels while calling Paine a "loathsome reptile." Ministers and their congregants, caught up in the early stages of a religious revival now known as the Second Great Awakening, gloried in news of Paine's physical and mental decline, conjuring up a drunk, unshaven, and decrepit Paine, writhing in agony, begging, "Oh, Lord, help me! Oh, Christ, help me!"

Some of that fantasy was founded in fact. Even at his best, Paine was rough and unpolished—and a mean drunk. In his tortured final years, living in New Rochelle and New York City, he displayed signs of dementia. (Scurrilous rumors about cats aside, Paine's behavior throughout his life appears erratic enough that Eric Foner wondered if he suffered from crippling bouts of depression; Nelson offers a tentative diagnosis of bipolar disorder.) At home, he was besieged by visitors who came either to save his soul or to damn it. He told all of them to go to hell. When an old woman announced, "I come from Almighty God to tell you that if you do not repent of your sins and believe in our blessed Savior Jesus Christ, you will be damned," Paine replied, "Pshaw. God would not send such a foolish ugly old woman as you."

Admirers of Paine's political pamphlets have tried to ignore his religious convictions. In 1800, a New York Republican Society resolved, "May his Rights of Man be handed down to our latest posterity, but may his Age of Reason never live to see the rising generation." That's more or less how things have turned out. So wholly has "The Age of Reason" been forgotten that Paine's mantle has been claimed not only by Ronald Reagan but also by the Christian Coalition's Ralph Reed, who has invoked him, and the North Carolina senator Jesse Helms, who in 1992 supported a proposal to erect a Paine monument in Washington, D.C. Nor have liberals who embrace Paine, including the editors of TomPaine.com, had much interest in the latter years of his career. Maybe that's what it means to be a lesser Super Friend: No one cares about your secret identity. They just like your costume.

Historians, too, have tried to dismiss "The Age of Reason," writing it off as simplistic and suggesting either that Paine wrote it to please his French jailers or that, in prison, he went mad. This interpretation began with Mercy Otis Warren, who called "The Age of Reason" "jejune," and concluded that, in prison, Paine had "endeavoured to ingratiate himself." Nelson, too, makes much of "the Terror's devastation of Paine's psyche." (Only a miraculous if temporary recovery or the mania following depression, Nelson suggests, made it possible for Paine to write his last great work, "Agrarian Justice," the very next year.)

But Paine considered his lifelong views on religion inseparable from his thoughts on government: "It has been the scheme of the Christian Church, and of all the other invented systems of religion, to hold man in ignorance of the Creator, as it is of Governments to hold man in ignorance of his rights." Writing about kings and subjects in "Common Sense," he wondered "how a race of men came into the world so exalted above the rest, and distinguished like some new species." In "The Age of Reason," he used much the same language to write about priests and prophets: "The Jews have their Moses; the Christians their Jesus Christ, their apostles and saints; and the Turks their Mahomet, as if the way to God was not open to every man alike." He wrote "Common Sense," "Rights of Man," and "The Age of Reason" as a trilogy. "Soon after I had published the pamphlet 'Common Sense,' in America," he explained, "I saw the exceeding probability that a revolution in the system of government would be followed by a revolution in the system of religion."

Just because Paine was wrong about the coming of that revolution doesn't mean we ought to forget that he yearned for it. In 1805, John Adams railed that the latter part of the eighteenth century had come to be called "the Age of Reason": "I am willing you should call this the Age of Frivolity . . . and would not object if you had named it the Age of Folly, Vice, Frenzy, Brutality, Daemons, Buonaparte, Tom Paine, or the Age of the Burning Brand from the Bottomless Pit, or anything but the Age of Reason." Yet even Adams would not have wished that so much of Paine's work—however much he disagreed with it—would be so willfully excised from memory. "I know not whether any man in the world has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Tom Paine," Adams admitted, adding, with irony worthy of the author of "Common Sense," "Call it then the Age of Paine."

Adams wrote those words, in 1805, as if Paine were already dead. A few months later, a neighbor of Paine's came across the old man in a tavern in New Rochelle, so drunk and disoriented and unkempt that his toenails had grown over his toes, like bird's claws. While Adams, at his home in Quincy, busied himself reflecting on the Age of Paine, Paine hobbled to the polls in New Rochelle to cast his vote in a local election. He was told that he was not an American citizen and was turned away. So much for the rights of man. Three years later, as the seventy-two-year-old Paine lay dying in a house in Greenwich Village, his doctor pressed him, "Do you wish to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?" Paine paused, then whispered, "I have no wish to believe on that subject." ♦

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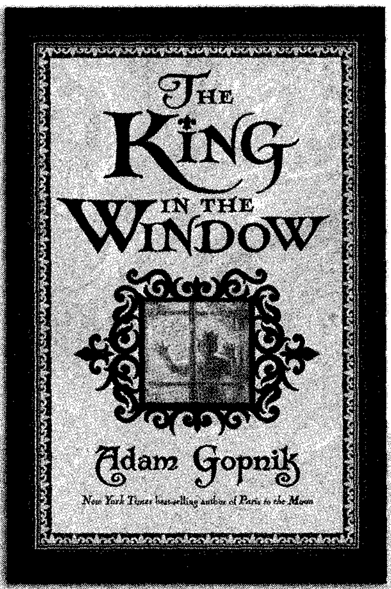
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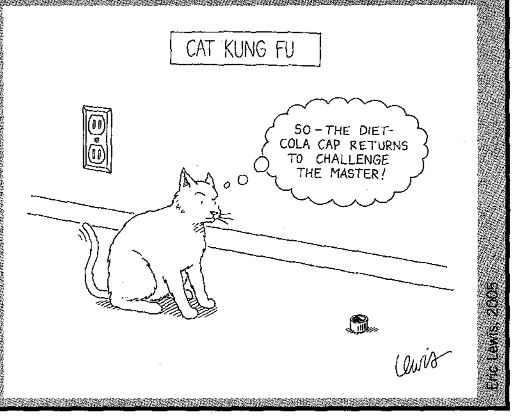
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BOOKS

RED SHEEP

How Jessica Mitford found her voice.

BY THOMAS MALLON

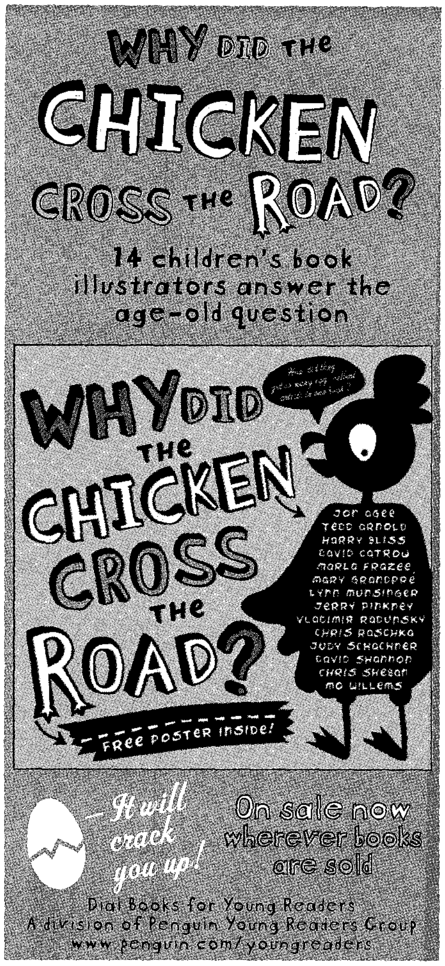
The most important letter Jessica Mitford ever wrote was a forgery, addressed to herself ("Darling Decca") at the age of nineteen, on February 3, 1937. Pretending to be a girlfriend travelling on the Continent, the future muckraker issued an effervescent pseudo-invitation to come across the Channel: "We have taken a house in Dieppe—that is, Auntie has taken it! We mean to make it the centre of a sort of motor tour to all the amusing places round. We are going there from Austria on Wednesday, and we should so *love* you to join us next weekend sometime."

Mitford's real destination was war-torn Spain, which she intended to reach after eloping with her second cousin Esmond Romilly, a nephew of Winston Churchill's who had achieved a precocious stardom through both his flamboyant rebellion against British public-school culture and his later service with the International Brigade defending Madrid. The Dieppe ruse worked. Shown the letter of invitation, Mitford's mother, Lady Redesdale, let her daughter slip out of England, and before long Decca and Romilly were in Loyalist Bilbao, transmitting news of the Spanish war for a press bureau that had taken them on.

Looked at in terms of class and period, all this might be regarded as normal youthful revolt. Lord Redesdale, known to his children as "Farve," was a glowering martinet who used a stopwatch to time the sermons of whatever vicar he hired for the Cotswolds village that the Mitfords dominated. His wife ("Muv") insisted that their six daughters, widely spaced in age but sharing a complicated matrix of games, nicknames, and nonsense languages, receive much of their education at home. Such confinement was especially resented by Decca, who from the start possessed terrific gumption: "Our night-nursery window looked out on the churchyard," she recalled when she was in her seventies. "Once an uncle asked me if I wasn't afraid of seeing all those tombstones at night? Not a bit (I am alleged to have replied), when there's a full moon I enjoy watching Farve dig up the corpses to feed the chickens. What a DEAR little girl I must have been."

She was the fifth of the sisters to make a London début. All of them had looks, wit, and aggression to burn; each was "a terrific hater," Decca remembered. The escapades of the older ones had been harmless enough during the nineteen-twenties heyday of the Bright Young People (Evelyn Waugh even worked a hidden reference to twelve-year-old Decca's pet lamb into "Vile Bodies"), but they proved a good deal less amusing when conducted under the darker clouds of the decade that followed. It was the grotesque doings of her sisters, more than the eccentricities and strictness of her parents, that prompted Decca's flight in 1937.

"Whenever I see the words 'Peer's Daughter' in a headline," sighed Muv, "I know it's going to be something about one of you children." In 1936, after the collapse of her marriage to Bryan Guinness, heir to the brewing fortune, Diana, the greatest beauty among the girls, wed Sir Oswald Mosley, the head of the British Union of Fascists. This new connection fired up Nazi enthusiasm in Unity (middle name Valkyrie), who soon became friendly with Goebbels, Göring, and Hitler. The Führer displaced some Jews from a choice Munich apartment so that Unity could have it instead. (Farve and Muv visited Germany and pronounced themselves also much impressed by the Nazis.) Nancy Mitford, the eldest and most caustic of the sisters, satirized the family's political adventures in a novel called "Wigs on the Green," but even she had the Mitford gift for group loathing; in her case, a weirdly virulent anti-Americanism. When Decca, the clan's only leftist, made her escape, Nancy joined forces with the family in trying to retrieve her.



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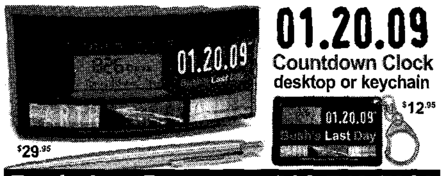

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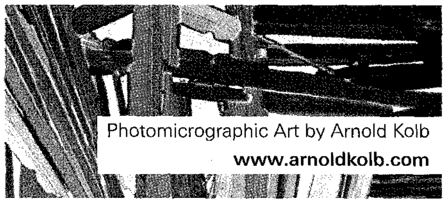

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Jessica Mitford (seated on the low wall, second from right) with her parents and six siblings at Swinbrook House, around 1934.

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After a period in Spain, the young Romillys did return, briefly, to England, where the lights and the electric heaters in their London flat "blazed away night and day," since nobody had ever informed Decca "that you had to pay for electricity." After the Munich pact of 1938, the couple left for America, determined to stay there while Britain's international alignments sorted themselves out. Esmond and Decca sponged and schemed and odd-jobbed their way up and down the East Coast; he stole cigars from Katharine Graham's father and then borrowed a thousand dollars from him to finance a share in a Miami restaurant. During the spring of 1940, in response to Hitler's westward invasions, Romilly enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He was killed the next year.

Decca remained in Washington with their baby daughter, Constancia (Dinky), finding work with the Office of Price Administration and a social life among the young New Dealers. She lived with Clifford and Virginia Durr, Southern liberals whose guests sometimes included the congressman Lyndon B. Johnson and his wife. ("Who is Lady Bird?" Muv wrote to Decca. "I looked her up in the Peerage, but could find no trace.") By the middle of the war, Mitford had moved to San Francisco and married an O.P.A. lawyer named Robert Treuhaft. She became an American citizen in order to join the Communist Party, in whose activities she and her husband avidly participated for the next fifteen years.

Her frame of reference was decidedly unusual for an American Party member. In her memoir "A Fine Old Conflict" (1977), Mitford recalled being chosen to head the local *People's World* fund-raising drive, a campaign that "was to me reminiscent of the London season." Staff members of a California psychiatric clinic, to whom she confided her young life story in the course of a consultation about Dinky's thumb-sucking, concluded, "Since the mother lives in a fantasy world of her own, and is incapable of giving rational and credible answers to questions, it is impossible to treat the child further."

Mitford's natural leftward leanings were no doubt overstimulated by the "very lonely opposition" she had maintained within her family's feathered nest. Her ability to remain a Party member well past Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing Stalin in 1956, and beyond the Soviet invasion of Hungary later that year (necessary, she reasoned, "to preserve a socialist system...against what looks like a fascist coup"), suggests a garish, surrogate penitence for the Mitfords' Nazi sinnings. Her resignation from the Party, in 1958, came about "not on any principled issue" but only because the C.P. had "got rather drab and useless."

A reader of "Decca" (Knopf; $35), her newly collected letters, can only marvel at how such a lively spirit and instinctive debunker stayed so devoted to the

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Soviet commissars. Unity Mitford lasted several years in Nazi Germany before shooting herself when war broke out with England. (She survived.) It's hard to imagine her mischievous sister making it through a month in Soviet Russia without being sent off somewhere cold for reëducation. Mitford loved making fun of the Party's American jargon (her first extended piece of writing was a stencilled send-up called "Lifeitselfmanship"), and forever exhibited her difficulty with any form of piety or political correctness: "I should never have let you inveigle him to that Unitarian Sunday School," she writes a friend in 1959, after her son has criticized her for generalizing about people. Several years later, she explains to her sister Debo, now the Duchess of Devonshire, that she doesn't accept invitations "to join committees against the wicked toys they've got [in the U.S.]," not when she knows she "should have rather longed for a model H-bomb if they had been about when we were little." Perhaps the worst she's heard about LSD is that "it makes one love everyone."

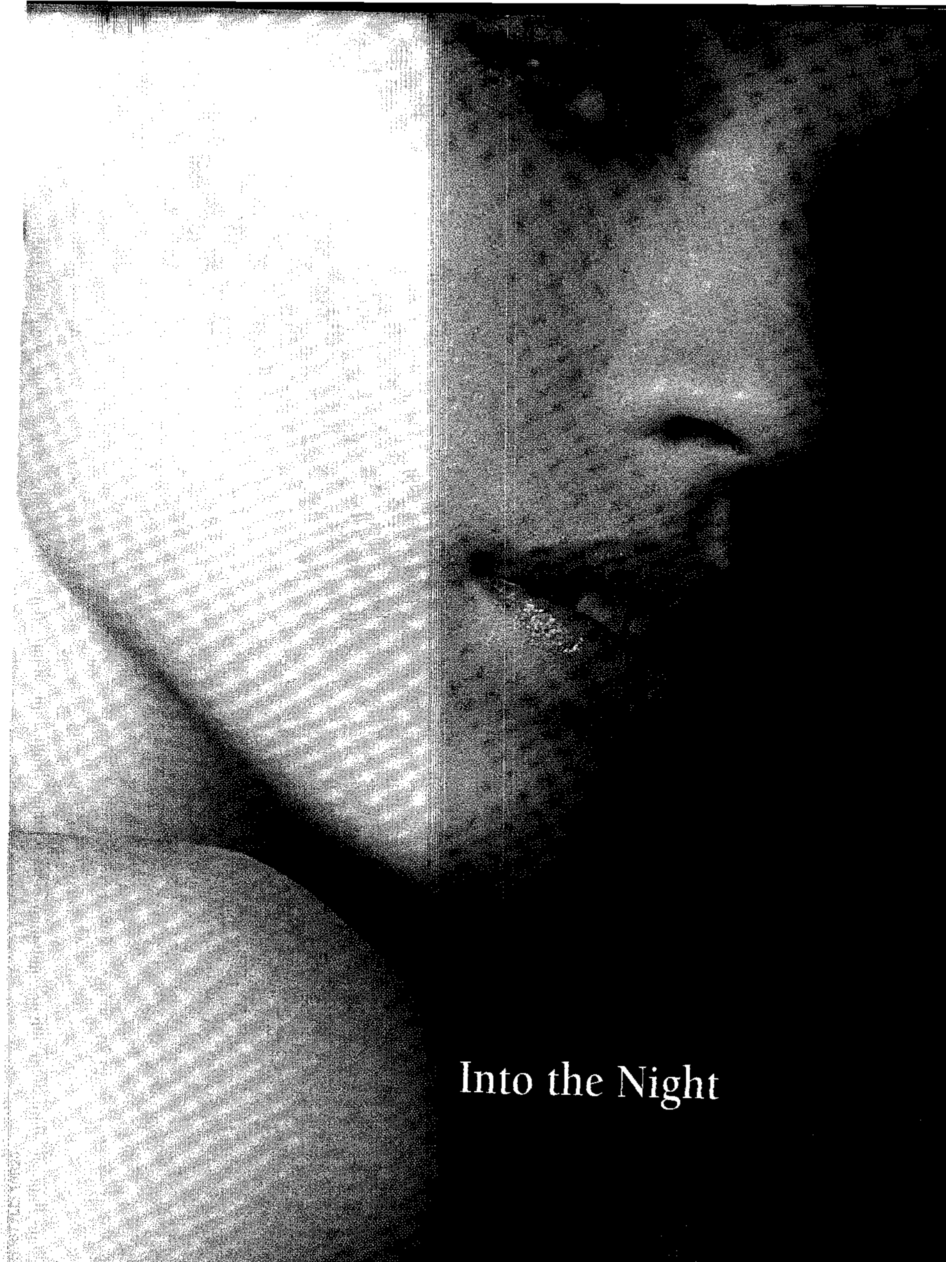
California's Communist Party was known for being looser than other state affiliates, but Mitford's joking still got her into trouble, and at no point in her letters or "A Fine Old Conflict" does she question the Party's right to chastise and shun its members for the smallest deviations. In 1948, while looking forward to a relaxation of the still considerable tension between her and her mother, she seriously inquired of the local Party hierarchy whether she would be risking expulsion by allowing Muv to visit Oakland. Her ideological worst and self-mocking best are both on display in a letter written ten years later:

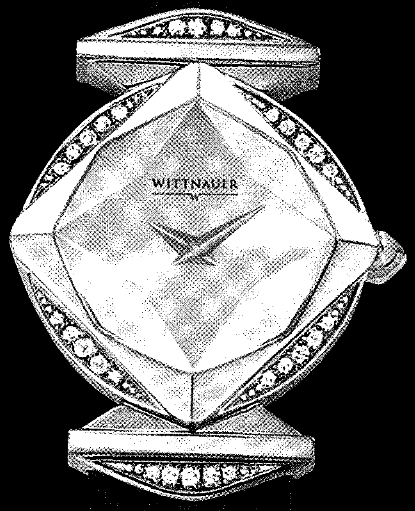
> Sat. night to Dobby's, a long battle to the end over Dr. Zhivago (Pasternak) with Dobby taking the position the S.U. is completely justified [in ordering the book's suppression], the rest of us agreeing with Laurent who pointed out that the Nobel Prize people baited a nice juicy trap for the S.U. into which they fell like a ton of bricks. Needless to say, no one had read the book.

But most of her political activity was local, involving work for the East Bay Civil Rights Congress (C.R.C.) on numerous cases of police brutality perpetrated by the Oakland police department. Mitford showed plenty of bravery while travelling to the South in 1951 with several other Communist women to campaign against the conviction of Willie McGee, a black Mississippian condemned to death for raping a white woman who had probably been his consensual lover. Despite subpoenas received and passports denied, Mitford sustained an over-all feeling of comfort within America, whose "lack of bleakness" contrasted with so much of what she remembered of England. "Could it be," she wrote her mother with some amazement in 1951, "that I am, after all, the only one who is really settled down, as they say?"

Of all the sisters, she probably made the happiest marriage; Treuhaft, himself a fine wit, is "darling old Bob" in decades' worth of her letters, whose domestic subject matter proceeds from Pablum ("a kind of sawdust which they mix with water & feed to children here") and housekeeping (four-year-old Dinky shows her how to clean the stove properly) to a phase in which the children are old enough to pass out leaflets and make do with sandwiches for dinner on days of heightened political activity. The Treuhafts' worst sorrow—the death of their first son, who was run over by a bus in 1955—receives scant mention in the letters; in Mitford's memoirs, she could not bear to write of it at all.

Treuhaft proved fully supportive of Mitford's late start as a writer, which came toward the end of the nineteen-fifties, when the dissolution of the C.R.C. left a "vacuum" in her life. Amid early efforts at journalism (a 1957 piece for *The Nation* about the railroading of a sex-crime defendant by sensation-seeking journalists), she produced a first volume of memoirs, which was published in the United States as "Daughters and Rebels," though Mitford preferred "Red Sheep." The book required a great struggle and much assistance from friends and neighbors, who made up what Mitford, with an unusual absence of authorial ego, called "the Old Dec Writing Committee." Even after tremendous success, she craved editing and was happy to concede points to reviewers. (In 1984, she responded to a notice I'd given to her slim memoir of her friendship with the journalist Philip Toynbee by writing, "I really loved your review—once I'd got





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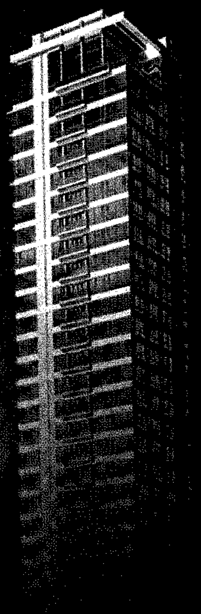

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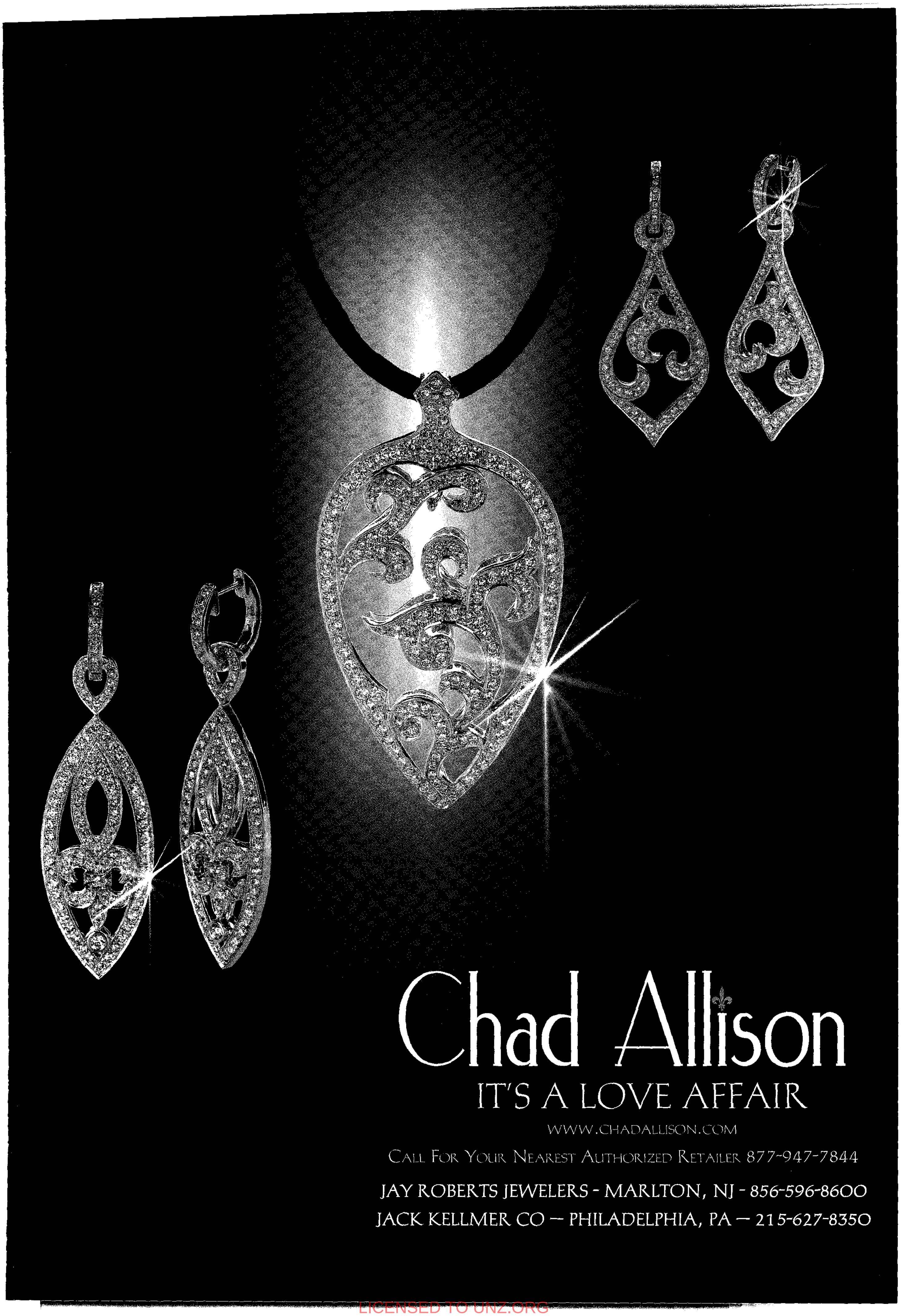

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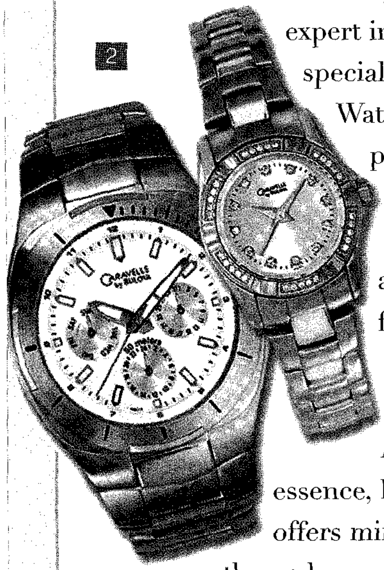

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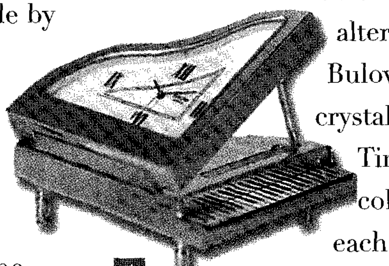
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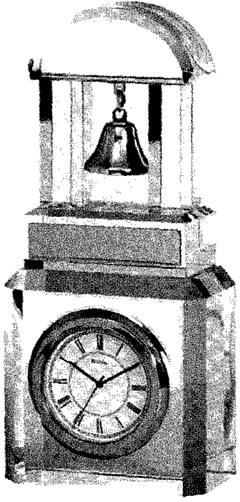
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over being a slippery character. And I expect you are absolutely right about that Alas.")

Death became her. Led to the subject by Treuhaft, who was doing legal work for a Bay-area co-op arranging inexpensive burials, Mitford soon beheld the American funeral industry as a high-pressure game of profiteering, not to mention a paradise of macabre euphemism and fantastic technique: "If [the corpse] should be bucktoothed, his teeth are cleaned with Bon Ami and coated with colorless nail polish," she wrote in "The American Way of Death" (1963). "His eyes, meanwhile, are closed with flesh-tinted eye caps and eye cement."

It all left her "roaring" (a favorite word). A muckraker had been born, one whose spirits would forever be as high as her dudgeon. Disguising her nervousness—she sometimes preceded a difficult phone call with a stiff drink—she learned to dig for the dirty secret and the suspicion-raising fact. "What I should love to know," she wrote her old friends Philip and Kay Graham at the Washington *Post*, "is some of the inside negotiations that go on between the flower folks and the advertising departments of newspapers." Before "The American Way of Death," obituary pages often gave in to pressure from florists and refused to include the phrase "Please Omit Flowers" in death notices.

Mitford's exquisitely disgusting chapter on embalming, which helped to make "The American Way of Death" a best-seller, had nearly been cut by her editors. The book also had to survive the funeral-industry's trumpeting of the author's still recent Communist Party past, news that Mitford parried by pointing out that "all the best embalmers are Communists vide Lenin." Having dodged reporters for two decades, whenever news like her remarriage or disinheritance made her good Mitford-sister copy, she now revelled in being recognized as a crusading literary celebrity.

Magazines began calling with story ideas, and she soon had "masses of things ½ cooking." The tastiest results, including her takedown of Elizabeth Arden's exorbitantly ineffectual Maine Chance beauty spa, were eventually collected in "Poison Penmanship" (1979), and her newly assembled letters sometimes show her writing home as a way of making notes for her articles: "I have cased the visitors book," she tells Treuhaft from Maine Chance in November of 1965. "Part of it reads like a list of products advertised in the daily press (Heinz, Ford, Fleishmann etc)." Retaining a sense of herself as a kind of lucky amateur, Mitford was always surprised by her success in investigative journalism. She was particularly pleased when her 1970 exposé of the Famous Writers School, a mail-order fraud that had grown fat with promises to the aspirant scribbler, forced the operation out of business.

The onetime revolutionary was actually a born meliorist, shining her gleeful light upon the venal and phony, even if she never again found quite so glorious a target as the funeral industry. Her largest other subject was the U.S. prison system, which she thought exhibited several similarities to her earlier field of investigation: the wardens were often "such ducks, just like undertakers," earnestly explaining that they'd gone into the work because they "love people"; the embalmer's Flextone skin preparation had a kind of counterpart in the Advanced 'Han-Ball' Tear Gas Grenade she saw displayed at a corrections convention. But the prison book that she produced, "Kind and Usual Punishment" (1973), while full of fine stuff on matters like abusive medical experimentation ("The gradual onset of scurvy in the five prisoners is traced by Dr. Hodges with the enthusiasm of a young mother recording Baby's first steps"), was too much of a downer for the author's natural talents. In "The American Way of Death," the corpse, well out of it but all made up, seems often to be as amused as the reader; not so, of course, the wretched convict.

At least a part of Mitford's skill in exposing sharp practice came from her own taste for scams and dodges. For decades, she cheated the phone company of reversed long-distance charges—"just ring here collect for Wanda Spikdec, who will then get the number to ring back immediately"—and on occasion she travelled wearing a large arm bandage that would guarantee special treatment at the airport. She even suckered the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas, whose bulk purchase of her papers and "associated materials"

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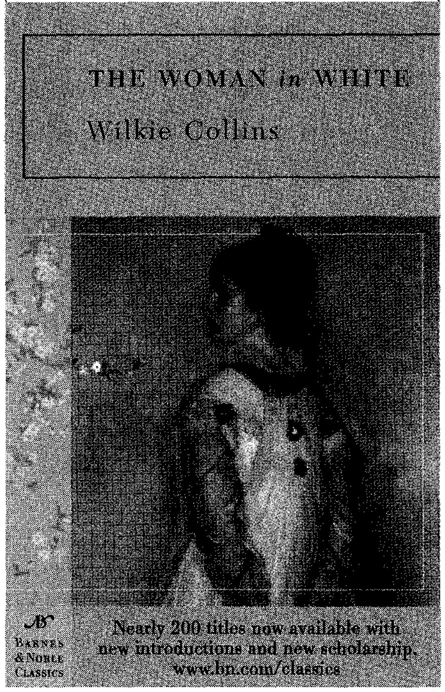

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Heralding Marilyn Crispell, *Down Beat* magazine claimed that "one can't quite believe that she can play so perfectly and still be human." Join Crispell and her collaborators, Grammy-winner Joe Lovano on saxophone, composer Mark Helias on bass, and former Bill Evans side-man Paul Motian on drums, as they light up Miller Theatre's stage with decades of combined jazz performance experience.

Marilyn Crispell, piano
Joe Lovano, saxophone
Mark Helias, bass
Paul Motian, drums

Jazz

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OPPRESSION

I begin by a window, a lamp over my shoulder,
and a glance outside to see
if a light snow is falling or if it's just the day's
floaters in an old man's eyes. I check the clouds
for signals and cuneiforms
among the pillows, and the mountain ash
for its resistance to autumn, and only then
am I ready for the news, the artillery,
the detonators, the beheadings,
the bloodstains and marrow, the numbers,
and the black hearts of the officials. I need
the proof Peary sought in ice, and Odysseus
at sea, to believe a fox, say, or a cougar
can get away, and men and women also,
so camouflaged in plain view that we see them
only in the representations, in the stories
or briefly visible in the leaves or sky,
escapees surviving by feel or ducked down
in their thoughts, unable to speak freely.

—*Marvin Bell*

turned out to include, upon delivery, some cremated remains belonging to a client of Treuhaft's.

The prologue to "Daughters and Rebels" includes the confession, odd in a memoirist, that "looking backward is not much in my nature." Even so, the second half of Mitford's life was often spent coming to terms with the first. She several times travelled to Lady Redesdale's home on Inch Kenneth, a Hebridean island in which Decca had received, from her only brother, a one-sixth share. (An attempt to donate her portion to the Communist Party of Great Britain proved unsuccessful.) By 1960, her gradual reconciliation with Muv had become a source of deep pleasure, however it may have ended up distorting "Daughters and Rebels": "It seemed fairer to portray her as she is now, improved, since improving at any time of life is such a struggle, don't you think?" Mitford wrote to Virginia Durr.

Her sisters were a more intractable matter. Unity, who died in 1948 from the aftereffects of her suicide attempt, would come to Mitford in dreams that reflected Decca's own enduring and horrified love: "Well there's no forgiveness possible (nor would it have been sought by that feckless, unregenerate soul)." In the nineteen-seventies, a willingness to help Unity's biographer, David Pryce-Jones, get to the whole truth about his subject nearly ended Mitford's relationship with Debo.

With Diana, there had long since been nothing left to sunder. Mitford disliked not being on speaking, or writing, terms with almost anyone, but at the close of a letter to Muv she would send love to relations "with the usual exceptions." She was prepared to go to great lengths to avoid seeing the Mosleys during a 1959 visit to Paris, where not only Nancy but Diana's family would be present: "We envisage scenes as in corny French bedroom farces, the Mosleys popping out of one room, down an oubliette, [the Treuhafts] hiding in the stove, etc. As I pointed out to Nancy, just their chosen place for us anyway."

Nancy Mitford—the most brilliant and personally cruel of the sisters—remained the one whose approval Decca most desired, the only one for whom she could become a "doormat" time and again. Lady Redesdale once pointed out that Nancy's letters "usually contain a skillfully hidden dagger pointed straight at one's heart," but, when compared with Decca's, the letters collected in "Love from Nancy" (1993) come across as grating little performances, Brought to you by The New Yorker Promotion Department

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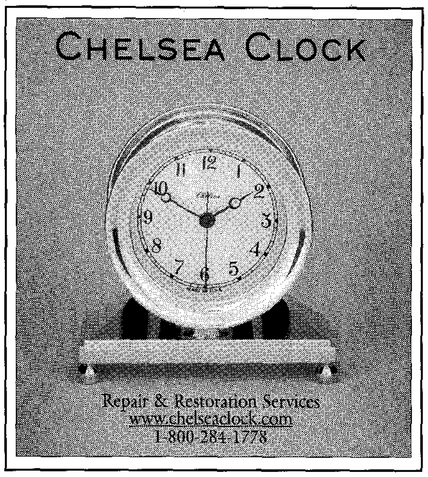

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falsely shrewd and oddly fluttering, self-congratulatory even when self-critical. The contentment they proclaim, over even Nancy's long and manifestly unfulfilling affair with a married French colonel, isn't the least bit convincing. If Decca, so badly teased and knocked off balance by her oldest sister, had been interested in the last laugh, she could have had it.

Her own letters are so full of comic set pieces, vivid narrative, and wonderfully replicated speech (including a whole page of parodic Southern palaver written out during a 1961 visit to the Durrs) that one wonders why Mitford never tried writing a novel. Fear of imitating Nancy's success in the genre may have been a factor; Decca even worried that the British title of her first memoir, "Hons and Rebels," might cause the older sister, famous for popularizing "U" and "non-U" speech distinctions, to "think it's cashing in on her stuff." One suspects, however, a more fundamental reason; namely, that the novel would have seemed too precious and artificial a form to such a lover of real-life rumpus and corrective action.

Letter-writing, by contrast, always retained its element of practical urgency, even as it allowed Mitford to roar and entertain and make verbal equivalents of the faces she liked to make at the lectern in front of flesh-and-blood crowds. If she sometimes overindulged tendencies toward the crude and the cute, these resulted only in small patches upon her contributions to a genre that was never designed for aesthetic perfection. "Decca" is a smashing accumulation, a buoyant offering atop the last wave of a literary form that now, having disappeared into the electronic ether, lies as dead as one of Mitford's Flextoned corpses. During the fax's brief moment, between the post and e-mail, Mitford corresponded with Miss Manners over the etiquette governing the new machine, and managed to adapt at least one old epistolary convention to the world's new instantaneousness: "Yrs of 9:54 from Chatsworth just rec'd," she informed Debo.

Mitford preferred gadgets to greenery ("Nature, nature, how I hate yer") and believed that keeping fit was only likely to prolong the miseries of whatever cancerous affliction got one in the end. Nursing homes would have been a marvellous subject for her, better than her late exploration of obstetrics; she described herself as going "from the Grave to the Cradle" with "The American Way of Birth," in 1992. She did, after a bad fall, give up drinking, but backslid from efforts to quit smoking, which included her husband's attempt at aversion therapy: "Bob collected a ton of disgusting butts & ashes, & all I did was to breathe in deeply & say 'HOW divine.'" Their marriage survived an affair of Treuhaft's in the mid-nineteen-eighties, and they soon returned to "all the old feelings of pleasantness & fun" between the two of them.

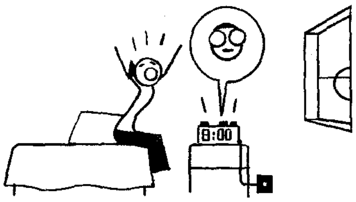
As friends died off, Mitford realized that she missed the arrival of their letters more than the people themselves: "Oh for the writing on the env!" In the middle of the night, two weeks before she died, of lung cancer, she wrote a splendidly matter-of-fact farewell to Treuhaft, asleep in another room: "Bob—it's so ODD to be dying, so I must just jot a few thoughts." Those mostly concerned the good fortune they'd had together, but Mitford moved on to giving her husband some advice: "You'll need someone—I mean you've got all those household skills, cooking etc., pity to waste don't you agree? Be thinking of someone agreeable. You won't have to as they'll come flocking I bet. I do have some ideas but fear to mention for fear of annoying or being intrusive, none of my business you'll say." She concluded with an expression of avidity for the next simple thing: "By the way—do go to that film this evening [and] dinner.... I long to hear all about it.... Should be v. innaresting." She died on July 23, 1996; her cremation cost four hundred and seventy-five dollars.

Mitford assessed herself, accurately, as being "not a specially introspective type." She "never felt 'let down'" by anyone, and, as much as she took to America, she found the "pursuit of happiness" to be "an absurd idea." Nonetheless, she found it, in the knockabout company of enemies and friends alike. To those who had assured her that a week at Maine Chance spa would leave her feeling wonderful, she later reported, "As I always feel perfectly OK anyhow, I haven't noted the difference." A week spent with her letters makes everybody else seem a bore. One wonders how *she* stood it, and with such a fine old gusto. ◆

BRIEFLY NOTED

Half of a Yellow Sun, *by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Knopf; $24.95).* Based loosely on political events in nineteen-sixties Nigeria, this novel focusses on two wealthy Igbo sisters, Olanna and Kainene, who drift apart as the newly independent nation struggles to remain unified. Olanna falls for an imperious academic whose political convictions mask his personal weaknesses; meanwhile, Kainene becomes involved with a shy, studious British expat. After a series of massacres targeting the Igbo people, the carefully genteel world of the two couples disintegrates. Adichie indicts the outside world for its indifference and probes the arrogance and ignorance that perpetuated the conflict. Yet this is no polemic. The characters and landscape are vividly painted, and details are often used to heartbreaking effect: soldiers, waiting to be armed, clutch sticks carved into the shape of rifles; an Igbo mother, in flight from a massacre, carries her daughter's severed head, the hair lovingly braided.

Chourmo, *by Jean-Claude Izzo, translated from the French by Howard Curtis (Europa; $14.95).* In the second volume of Izzo's Marseilles trilogy, Fabio Montale, an introspective ex-cop with a placid life based on cronies, aperitifs, and a little fishing, is yanked back into his city's politically charged underworld. On one single sunny day, a beautiful cousin whom he hasn't seen in years enlists his help to find her son, a wayward teen-ager, and an old friend is gunned down in front of him on the street. Izzo, who died in 2000, is more than adept at noir conventions—gritty light, sudden switches of scene, the pervasive rot of cynicism, which sullies even the best intentions. But what makes his work haunting is his extraordinary ability to convey the tastes and smells of Marseilles, and the way memory and obligation dog every step his hero takes.



The Lost, *by Daniel Mendelsohn (HarperCollins; $27.95).* When Mendelsohn was a child, his resemblance to Shmiel Jäger, a great-uncle who died in the Holocaust, would make elderly relatives burst into tears. This memoir tells of his search to uncover the truth about the life and death of Shmiel, and of his wife and four daughters, by interviewing as many people who knew them as he can find. The result is a spectacular trail of discoveries, disappointments, and staggering coincidences which leads to Ukraine, Australia, Israel, and Scandinavia. Always aware of the danger of misrepresenting his finds—"How do you find out who someone was, really?"—Mendelsohn constructs an artful, looping narrative that includes elaborate digressions on such topics as the Hebrew Bible, Homeric narrative, and tensions within his own immediate family. The technique pays off, showing how the Holocaust continues to affect people who had no direct experience of it. A classicist, Mendelsohn cites Virgil's line "*sunt lachrimae rerum*," and comments, "*There are tears in things;* but we all cry for different reasons."

Nicole Kidman, *by David Thomson (Knopf; $25.95).* Thomson's bizarre paean to his favorite actress is ostensibly a meticulous study of an actress's career adumbrated by meditations on the nature of stardom. He analyzes the art films that test Kidman's dramatic powers and the commercial dross that pays the servants, and which he clearly feels is unworthy of her. A true obsessive, Thomson seems to have logged every detail of Kidman's public life; of an appearance in *In Style*, we learn that "on pages 332-33 . . . she is stretched out on a pink sofa." Ultimately, though, we hear much more about Thomson. In addition to his views on Kidman—her marriage, her boyfriends, "the curve of her bottom," and her forehead, which he hopes is not botoxed—he tells us about such matters as the time he met Katharine Hepburn and a play he once directed. What begins as an analysis of stardom ends up as a case study of fandom.

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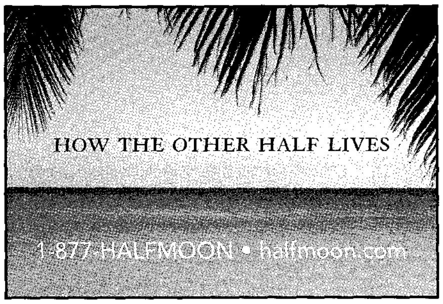
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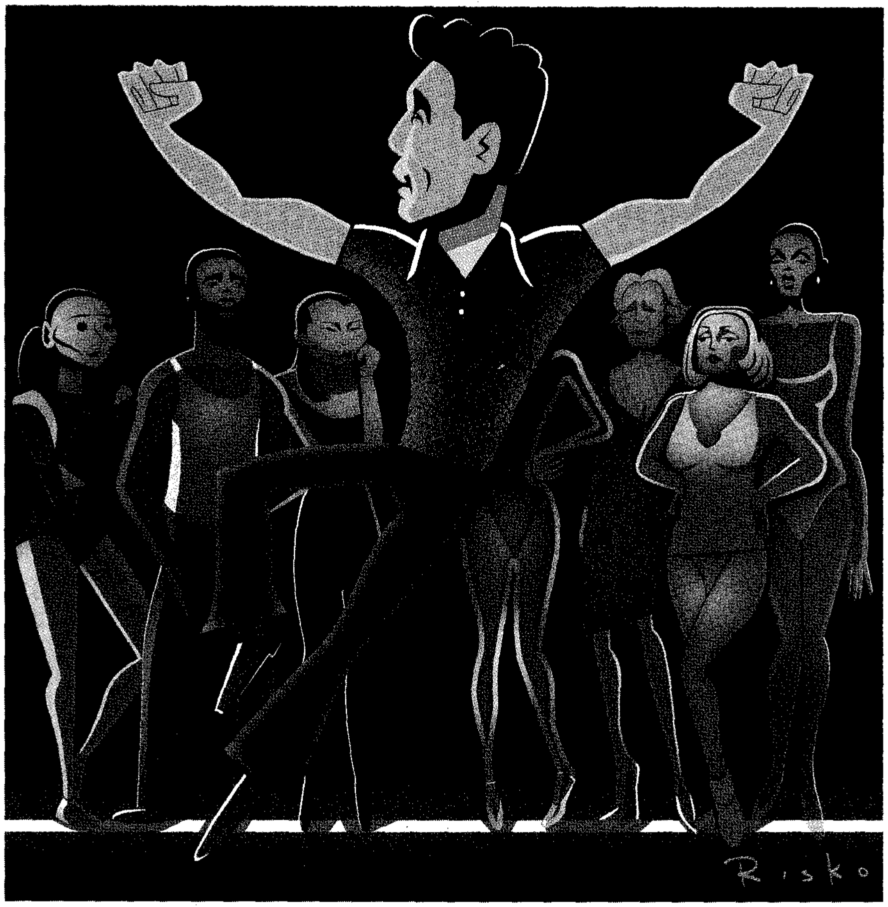
THE THEATRE

TOEING THE LINE

"A Chorus Line" is back on Broadway.

BY JOHN LAHR



Auditions for life: would-be dancers try to make it on the Great White Way.

ROBERT RISKO

In the 1933 film "42nd Street," the theatre director Warner Baxter sends the understudy Ruby Keeler out onstage with the famous line "You're going out a youngster, but you've got to come back a star." The musical "A Chorus Line," which opened on Broadway in 1975 and closed in 1990, after more than six thousand performances, reversed the mythic path from anonymity to celebrity. One of its main characters, Cassie, is a dancer who has risen from the ranks and now wants to return to the ensemble. Uncomfortable standing out, she wants, literally and figuratively, to toe the line. In the current, thrilling revival, under the direction of Bob Avian (at the Gerald Schoenfeld)—Avian co-choreographed the original, with Michael Bennett, who also conceived and directed the show—that line is a white one, extending the width of the proscenium, where the twenty-four dancers auditioning for eight spots in a Broadway chorus stand like convicts in a lineup while the abrasive director, Zach (Michael Berresse), interrogates them, with godlike invisibility, from the stalls. "Why shouldn't you be the best you can be?" Zach asks Cassie (Charlotte d'Amboise), his former lover whom he first plucked from a chorus at the age of twenty-two. Cassie replies, "That's not a decision, that's a disease. God, good, better, best—I hate it!"

This is definitely not star talk, or even, really, Broadway talk. Back in 1975, "A Chorus Line" aspired to be part of Broadway's legend of good times, and also something completely different. Seeping into its cutthroat dance-off was not just a new look but a new sound—the post-Vietnam sound of retreat. Cassie's spiritual fatigue reflected the culture's nostalgia for a simpler, happier life, one undamaged by the nation's imperialism, one that would replace the destiny of me with the destiny of we. "A Chorus Line"'s sense of abdication spoke subliminally to its time; it is also what makes the musical so pertinent to the present, disillusioned generation. To win a place in the chorus, Cassie must give up her individuality. "You're distorting the combination," Zach barks at her as he runs the line through a routine. "Pull in. Cool it. Dance like everyone else." When, at the finale, the chorus struts its stuff in "One"—streamlined bodies moving in unison like a well-oiled machine—its victory is a triumph of anonymity. At first, the number in the song's title seems to refer to the ensemble's fabulous precision; in fact, it celebrates the star, whose entrance the chorus is setting up and for whom it is merely a backdrop. "One smile and suddenly nobody else will do," the performers sing. "You know you'll never be lonely with you know who." At the opening, as the hopefuls are put through their paces on Robin Wagner's brilliant, minimalist set, they stare at themselves, upstage, in dance mirrors. The image is a metaphor of their plight. To us, they are faceless; their glory, such as it is, is reflected glory. Still, although the dancers enter as numbers called out by Zach, over the course of the show we get to know their names and their stories, to understand their individual foibles, and to root for them. The members of the chorus are, for a moment, turned into principals; the ripples become the wave.

At the time of the original production, "A Chorus Line" was a departure not just in its content but in its method of creation. A product of the first musical "workshop"—long sessions in which the potential cast spoke to Michael Bennett about their real lives—it was "improvised into being," as Ethan Mordden puts it in "Broadway Babies." The genius of the show's construction is its ability to suggest a multitude of individual stories within its almost perpetual motion; at the same time, it makes piquantly clear that words are not the dancers' medium, in "Sing!," a clever stutter-song in which Al (Tony Yazbeck) finishes the sentences of his wife Kristine (Chryssie Whitehead):

KRISTINE: Oh, I know you're thinking
  what a crazy . . .
AL: . . . Dingaling . . .
KRISTINE: I could never really . . .
AL: . . . Sing.

Edward Kleban's shrewd lyrics sit easily on Marvin Hamlisch's inspired score. They always stay well within the limited demotic range of the characters; they are, nonetheless, full of wit and fun. In "I Can Do That," for instance, Mike (Jeffrey Schecter) demonstrates how his passion for dance grew out of sibling rivalry. "I'm watchin' Sis / Go pitterpat. / Said, 'I can do that, / I can do that.'"

"A Chorus Line" comes closest to a conventional boffo Broadway number in "Dance: Ten; Looks: Three," where Val (Jessica Lee Goldyn) spells out the joys of plastic surgery. "It's a gas! / Just a dash of silicone," she sings. "Shake your new maracas and you're fine! / Tits and ass can change your life. / They sure changed mine." The nubile Sheila (the sassy and superb Deidre Goodwin) certainly needs no adjustments. It's impossible to take your eyes off her; when Zach asks her to dance upstage, she does so grudgingly and then stops. "Sheila, do you know the combination?" Zach asks. She shoots him a look. "I knew it when I was in the front," she says. Will or won't Sheila be chosen? Believe me, it's worth the price of admission to find out.

At the finale of this production, the phalanx of all-singing, all-dancing top-hatted dancers sort of fades out. To clinch the poignance of the moment, it seems to me, they should have sashayed once more across the stage. But, if the dancers miss a final beat, the terrific production doesn't. At one point in the show, when Zach praises Cassie as "special," she responds, "No, we're all special." The musical plays as a hymn to the democratic ordinary, which, when it pulls together, can be extraordinary. On Broadway, however, individualism dies hard. "A Chorus Line" has its hand on its heart, but its eyes firmly on Fort Knox. The original production grossed two hundred and eighty million dollars worldwide. Bennett, who, at first, paid the members of his workshop just a dollar each for their stories, eventually worked out a royalty pool through which the chorus divided ten per cent of his own box-office royalties. (No royalties from this revival will go to the dancers who helped create the show.) "A Chorus Line" may sing about "What I Did for Love," but on Broadway, where they'll steal your stove and come back for the smoke, the story is always What I Did for Profit.

If "A Chorus Line" is a good idea almost perfectly realized, Tina Howe's surreal play "Birth and After Birth" (in revival at the Atlantic Theatre Company, under the direction of Christian Parker) is a good idea almost entirely botched. On a set decorated with a "Happy Birthday" banner and a Radio Flyer wagon full of presents, the manic, child-obsessed parents, Bill (Jeff Binder) and Sandy (Maggie Kiley), prepare to surprise their four-year-old son, Nicky (the droll Jordan Gelber). When he enters in his jammies, Nicky turns out to be balding, pot-bellied, and well over two hundred pounds. He is, so to speak, the elephant in the room—a gargantuan comic manifestation of all the energy, worry, and ambition that this crazy couple have projected onto him.

What Howe manufactures, ad nauseam, is the cacophony of noncommunication. Alternately coddled and abused, Nicky is engaged in a perpetual performance for his camera-toting father and his idealizing mother, but neither parent listens to him, or to the other. Inevitably, in this static emotional atmosphere, Nicky rampages around the room, tearing at packages, trashing the furniture, playing the cello, slithering between guests on the sofa—anything to get attention from his distracted and distracting parents. The child-as-adult reversal is a game that has been brilliantly played in the works of Charles Dizenzo and Dennis Potter. In Howe's hands, however, it becomes a familiar and exhausting exercise in sub-absurdist drama. The hell of child-rearing is matched only by the hell of the author's self-indulgence. Watching "Birth and After Birth" is a bit like banging your head against a wall. You feel great when it's over. ♦

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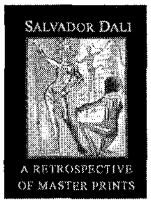

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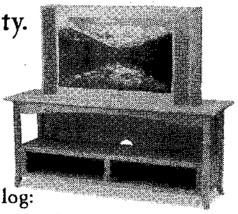

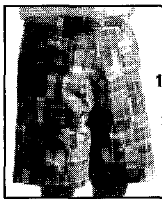

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Two New York projects show how to use Frank Gehry and how not to.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

Frank Gehry may be the most famous architect at work today, but, like so many of his peers, he has found it nearly impossible to build in New York. Twenty years ago, he designed a tower for the site of Madison Square Garden which never got built, and in recent years a number of projects—a redesign of One Times Square, a downtown branch of the Guggenheim, a hotel for Ian Schrager—have all foundered. Now, at the age of seventy-seven, Gehry has completed his first free-standing New York building, a headquarters for Barry Diller's InterActiveCorp, in Chelsea. It is only ten stories tall, but you can't drive down the West Side Highway without seeing it—a white glass palazzo that looks less like a building than like a computer-generated image of one. On a cloudy day, it appears to fade into the mist. Gehry has likened the billowing forms of the façade to sails, and from a distance it seems to be made of some kind of plastic or fibreglass. All-glass buildings often feel stiff, but in Gehry's hands even glass is relaxed.

No Gehry building is ordered in a traditional way, but this one comes closer than most. There is a broad, nearly symmetrical five-story base, with a façade that zigzags in and out, making five roughly equal sections. On top of this is a narrower five-story tower of Gehry's swooping, rhythmic shapes. The façade, unusually for Gehry, is made of a single material: instead of a jumble of clashing forms, the glass is all you see, covering everything like a blanket. By Gehry's standards, this is serene, but behind the placid exterior are some daring technical maneuvers, including a number of concrete structural columns set at angles. During construction, the Georgetown Company, Diller's partner in the development, got calls from people who wondered if it knew that the building was going up crooked.

There are more than fifteen hundred panels of glass in the InterActiveCorp building, and almost every one is unique; they curve to fit the shape of the façade, gently concave one moment, convex the next. The white color is provided by ceramic dots, known as frits, bonded to the glass. Fritting is a common way of reducing glare in glass buildings, but Gehry has exploited its potential for drama. Each panel is densely fritted at the top and bottom but nearly clear at eye level. Viewed from the outside, the building exhibits dark, hazy horizontal stripes, as if the glass had been spray-painted. At night, when the offices are lit, the pattern will reverse, and the clear glass sections will appear lighter. "The whole building will glow like a lantern," Gehry told me.

The description is characteristic of Gehry, who, for all his experimentation, is always more interested in emotional impact than in architectural dogma. This helps explain the scale of his current celebrity. Last year, he made a guest appearance on "The Simpsons," and this year saw the release of a worshipful documentary, "Sketches of Frank Gehry," by the director Sydney Pollack. In the "Simpsons" episode, Gehry designs a satirically Gehryesque concert hall that ends up being converted into a prison, and there are moments when it seems that Frank Gehry's fame could be its own kind of prison, that his style will become mere shtick. Certainly Gehry is not good at saying no. He has designed watches for Fossil—his signature prominently displayed on the watch faces—and earlier this year Tiffany launched a line of his jewelry. (It features many of the twisting shapes familiar from his architecture, but what is revolutionary in a building is merely pleasant in a necklace.) The angst-filled artist we see in Pollack's movie is unlikely to round out his days as a brand franchise, but he clearly needs commissions that spur new discoveries rather than clients who just want his name on their projects.

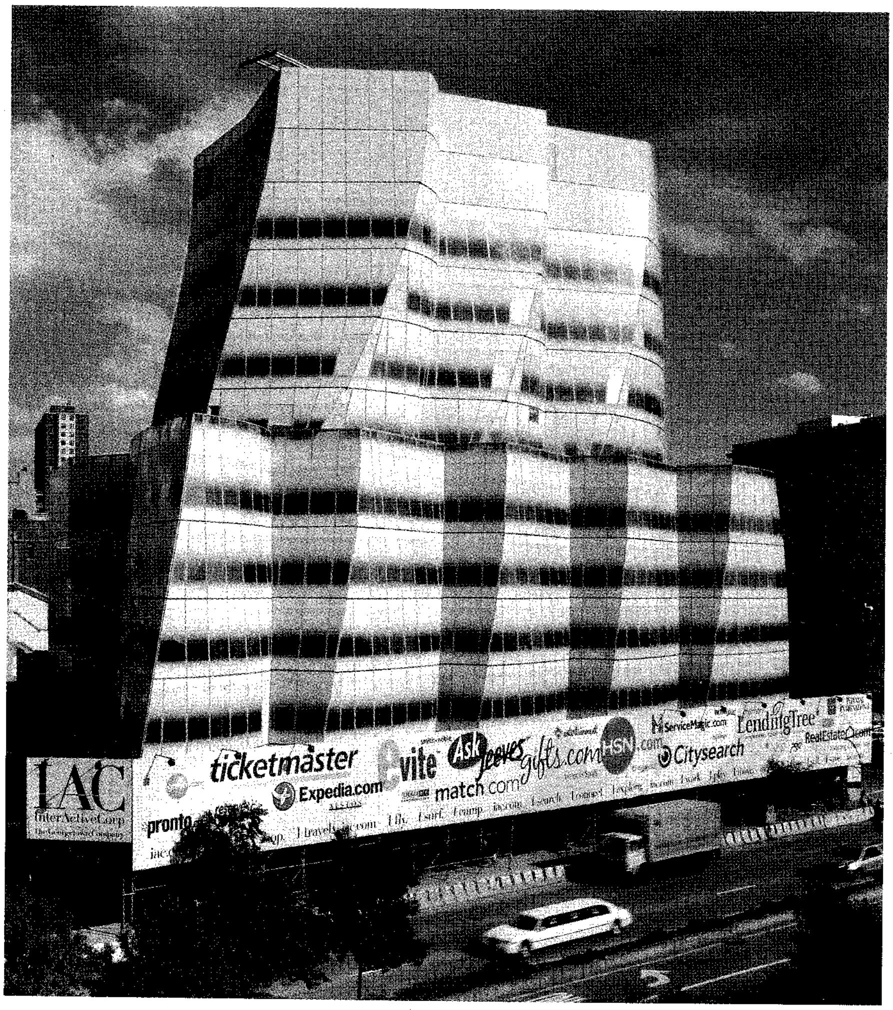
Barry Diller is an ideal client for Gehry. He and his development partner Marshall

Rose encouraged experiment, but Diller also has a company to run. Gehry has crafted interiors that balance architectural expression and practical concerns. Most of its offices will bear some hint of Gehry's style—a tilted wall, or a view that, because of the zigzagging shape, looks back at the building's own façade—but there is no space so oddly shaped that you can't work in it. People talk about the theatrics of Gehry's architecture, but he has an intuitive sense of when to express himself audaciously and when to be quiet.

It's a shame that this quality hasn't been more in evidence in Gehry's other New York venture, the Atlantic Yards development, in Brooklyn. This cluster of skyscrapers extending twenty-two acres around a new basketball arena for the Nets is the biggest project he has ever undertaken, and it has been the subject of bitter controversy for months. (Last month, following recommendations from the City Planning Commission, the plans were scaled back by eight per cent, but the project remains enormous.) Opponents complain that the sixteen residential towers will create a wall between the neighborhoods of Fort Greene and Prospect Heights. So far, they have cast the developer, Bruce Ratner, as the villain, suggesting that he is cynically using Gehry's name to add prestige to an ill-conceived scheme. In an open letter to Gehry published in *Slate*, the novelist Jonathan Lethem wrote, "I've been struggling to understand how someone of your sensibilities can have drifted into such an unfortunate alliance, with such potentially disastrous results."

Yet Gehry's design is a large part of the problem. He told me that he accepted the job in part because he has never taken on this kind of urban challenge, but his talents hardly seem suited to it. Gehry's great success has come from architectural jewels that sparkle against the background of the rest of a city—the Bilbao Guggenheim; the Walt Disney Concert Hall, in Los Angeles. In Brooklyn, the task is to create a coherent cityscape that relates comfortably to its surroundings. Gehry tried to do this by grouping some understated towers around a few very elaborate ones. (The six-hundred-and-twenty-foot-high main tower, foolishly named Miss Brooklyn, is full of self-conscious Gehryisms.) Rather than giving a sense of foreground and background, the juxtaposition of plain and fancy just looks like a few Gehrys bought for full price next to several bought at discount.

Gehry has told me that he sees the project as a kind of homage to the old Manhattan sky line, but the romance of that vista is a happy accident of diverse buildings in a tight web of streets. Atlantic Yards, by contrast, involves eliminating streets, and has the look more of a single structure spanning multiple blocks than of a townscape that has grown organically. Gehry perhaps conceived of the whole thing as one huge object that could play off against the city—a gigantic version of one of his jewels. The problem with trying to do Bilbao on this scale is that it ceases to be an eccentric counterpoint to the context. It *is* the context.



Gehry's new headquarters for InterActiveCorp. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

Buried within the construction is the building that was the catalyst for the entire project—an arena for the Nets, the basketball team purchased by Ratner and which he intends to move from New Jersey to Brooklyn. The arena is the best part of Gehry's plan. Its glass-enclosed spaces bring vibrancy to the intersection of Atlantic and Flatbush Avenues, and it will contain lots of public areas, not just for spectators but for anyone passing through. Such exclamation points in a cityscape are something Gehry knows how to create better than anyone. That's what Diller asked him to do, and it worked. Ratner's exclamation point, however, unlike Diller's, can't pay for itself, and Ratner is using it as a loss leader to justify an enormous real-estate venture. Although the site cries out for development, neither Ratner nor Gehry has a convincing idea of how this should be done. Ratner seems to have been less interested in using Gehry's architectural talent to best advantage than in trying to leverage his celebrity to make an unpopular development more palatable. Gehry, for his part, clearly loved the idea of taking on the biggest project in New York. But even the most famous architect in the world has limits. ♦

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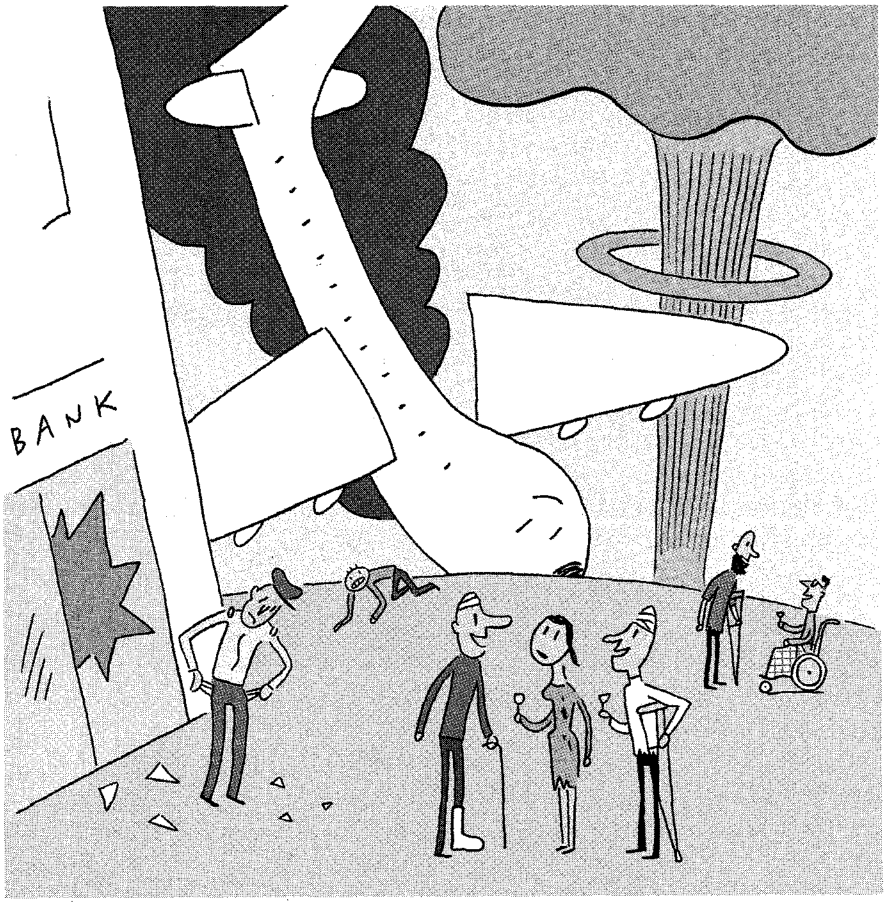
ON TELEVISION

LOST GENERATION

What the new dramas think they know.

BY TAD FRIEND

In television, victory doesn't have a thousand fathers so much as a thousand sons. Since "Lost" became a phenomenon on ABC two years ago, the networks have repeatedly sought to replicate its formula. But what is that formula, exactly? Should producers follow the show's first-year recipe precisely, mixing together a model U.N. on a tropical island after a plane crash, marinating each stranger in dark secrets, folding in a heaping of tensions (fistfights over the hot babes and the asthma inhaler) and a dollop of enigmatic threats (polar bears and murderous interlopers), then spicing to taste with the occult (a man who arises from his wheelchair, a baby coveted by the evil ones, some hydrating agent in the atmosphere that keeps everyone's skin ideally moisturized)? Or should they mine "Lost"'s own influences: "Twin Peaks" meets "Survivor" by way of "Lord of the Flies," "The X-Files," and, alas, "Gilligan's Island"? Or ring fresh changes on the show's narrative precursor, the wagon-train Western, in which motley pioneers are menaced by a war party? Or do audiences want commentary on the post-9/11 world—"Lost"'s emergent theme being how, in a society under threat, freedom is bartered for security? (Not for nothing is Terry O'Quinn's character, who orchestrates the group's transition from a state of nature into a supportive confederation, named John Locke.)



"The Nine," "Jericho," and "Six Degrees" have many elements in common.

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

The most promising of this fall's "Lost" sheep is ABC's "The Nine." After swiftly introducing us to nine diverse Los Angelenos (the high-strung assistant district attorney, the cocky surgeon and his social-worker girlfriend, the kindly bank manager, etc.) and gathering them at the Fidelity Republic Bank just as two armed robbers enter, the pilot jumps ahead fifty-two hours, when a hostage drama that followed the botched holdup ends with cops storming in and bullets flying. The show portrays this moment and its immediate aftermath using bleached film stock, grainy flashbacks, and rapid-fire jump cuts, which warns us that the narrative won't be linear, and the pilot never does give us an orderly understanding of the intervening events. But it's clear, from elliptical hints, that a lot occurred in that bank: that at least one hostage may have known one of the robbers; that both the bank manager and his teen-age daughter underwent something nasty; and that Nick, the cop (the pod-person-handsome Tim Daly), tried to be a hero but got overruled, with bloody consequences. The show nudges us to root for Nick by giving him not only authority issues—after being rescued, he socks the hostage negotiator—but a gambling problem, TV shorthand for "rascally but redeemable." Then, to make absolutely sure of us, it has Eva, the teller he had just asked out, die of gunshot wounds. Nick goes all broody for a few minutes and then starts eying the high-strung A.D.A., Kathryn (a simmering Kim Raver).

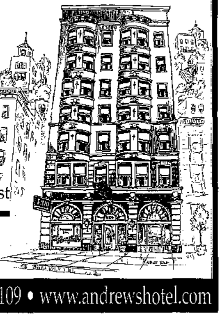
The hostage who emerges as a hero, having tackled one of the robbers, is Egan (John Billingsley), a sad sack who had been planning to kill himself. Afterward, he tosses out his old clothes and tells the bank manager, "I've got a second chance at life. We all do, don't we?" This conversation occurs at Eva's wake, but we get the idea; as John Locke declared in "Lost," "Everyone gets a new life on this island." The nine plan to meet periodically at a diner to work through their fresh crushes and traumas; everything is suddenly in play. We glean, for instance, that the social worker, Lizzie (Jessica Collins), newly pregnant, is going it alone because she was betrayed somehow in the bank by the surgeon, Jeremy (Scott Wolf, from "Party of Five," who's still such a Tom Cruise look-alike that you keep expecting him to hop up on the nearest couch). When they're having their first post-crisis meal, Jeremy stares at Lizzie's plate and says, "What are you doing? You're a vegetarian." She shoots back, "I wanted bacon!" After a beat, he says, "Do you want to talk about it?" "About what?" she replies darkly.

Wish I knew. Watching "The Nine" is like trying to do a crossword with only the Across clues. But it promises to reward our vigilance, which makes it very cunning programming; we like being unusually alert almost as much as the show's advertisers like having us that way.

In CBS's "Jericho," the town of Jericho, Kansas, may be the only place left after nuclear weapons destroy nearby Denver and other cities—somebody's response to a bellicose Presidential speech. The apocalypse cuts off escape routes and communications, and, less predictably, snuffs out everyone's sense of humor. When the villagers begin to hoard and loot, the mayor (Gerald McRaney, coasting here after a vivid turn as the sociopath George Hearst on "Deadwood") resets their moral compass with some folksy rumblings about coöperation and how the soul of America resides in Jericho. It's a cornpone version of the speech Jack gave early on in "Lost": "If we can't live together, we're going to die alone." The town's incuriosity about the larger world (where, presumably, many of their friends and relatives live) shades at times into an unsavory suggestion that all those Gomorrahs in cinders—New York, Chicago, Atlanta—deserved their fate.

Just before the bombs fall, the mayor's estranged son, Jake (Skeet Ulrich, all bug-eyed determination), returns for a one-day visit after a mysterious five-year absence. He quickly discovers that his ex-girlfriend is living with a banker (just once, I'd like to see the prodigal discover his ex with someone poor). Then, after yelling at his dad and his sanctimonious older brother and hugging his mom, Jake takes off again—only, post-catastrophe, to return to town at the wheel of a school bus full of children he rescued out there in the dark, including one to whom he gave a lifesaving tracheotomy by fashioning a breathing tube from juice-box straws. Uh-huh.

The elements of an isolated population under stress and a suspiciously knowing survivalist—Robert Hawkins (Lennie James), new in town but with his hazmat suit ready to go—are canny steals from



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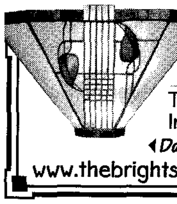

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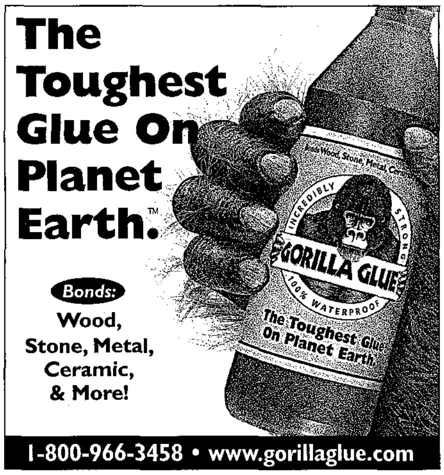
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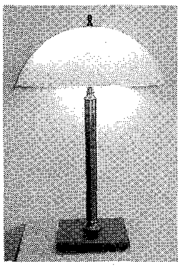
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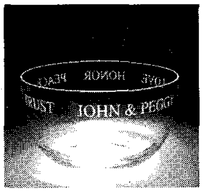
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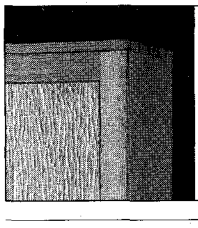
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"Lost." Yet "Jericho" lumbers; its townspeople spend all their time in the bar squabbling—they know one another so well that they haven't got room to grow. It might have been better to poach more thoroughly, extending the "Lost" franchise in the manner of "Law & Order" and "C.S.I." Perhaps something like "Lost: Radioactive."

"Jericho"'s title sequence emerges from a black-and-white TV screen fuzzed with static, a trope that calls to mind the era when "Twilight Zone" episodes often featured characters isolated by atomic catastrophes. The whole point of a "Twilight Zone" was the ironic kicker. Similarly, you watch "Jericho," if at all, only to learn the big secrets: who set off the bombs, and what do Jake and Hawkins know? And, most important, how many Biblical echoes can the show cram in? (The salt mine employed as a fallout shelter is a nice touch.) Playing out the curse that Joshua called down on efforts to rebuild Jericho—"With the loss of his firstborn shall he lay the foundation thereof, and with the loss of his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it"—would make a nifty special episode for sweeps month. And, as a bonus, it would decimate the cast.

ABC's "Six Degrees" is executive-produced by one of "Lost"'s creators, J. J. Abrams, and it shines with his trademark gloss. Handsomely shot on Manhattan locations, the show is laced with wit and blessed with fine actors, particularly Hope Davis as Laura, a playful woman who's trying to get past her war-correspondent husband's death in Iraq (she begins by tossing out his old clothes); and the majestically surly Campbell Scott as Steven, a once noted photographer who, after years of boozing, rediscovers his gift when he photographs a stranger—Laura—sobbing on a stoop.

Yet the coincidences that bring the show's six wayfarers together to form their own little island on the big island are vexingly hokey. "No one is a stranger—for long," Carlos, the public defender (Jay Hernandez), intones in a voice-over at the close of the pilot. He has just run into Mae (a dewy Erika Christensen) on the subway as she is about to leave town—after seeking her everywhere since winning her release on a charge of indecent exposure. She had clambered onto a moving street sweeper near Washington Square and thrown off her top in sheer jubilation at being young and bodacious in the greatest city on earth. First of all, that's exactly what the good folks in Jericho, Kansas, suspect is going on here. Second, it would never happen—no sanitation driver would waste time re-wetting Fifth Avenue when the show's production team had already slicked it down.

When Laura makes the acquaintance of Whitney (Bridget Moynahan) at the pedicurist, it's because Whitney, a fellow-Wasp, notices her Sonic Youth T-shirt and wonders if it's from a vintage store:

> LAURA: I was at the show.
> WHITNEY: At Roseland?
> LAURA: Yeah. Fall of '95. It was the night before—
> WHITNEY: Thanksgiving. I was there.
> LAURA: Really?

Are you sure that was us and not one of the show's writers? Whitney, a high-powered P.R. woman, also prepares one of those "as if!" meals for her boyfriend on the roof of their building, complete with a wet bar, candles, tulips, champagne, and linen napery. There seems to be only one thing missing—hold on, I'll think of it . . . Oh, yes: food.

In the second episode, after delivering a schmaltzy voice-over about how "anything is possible" here, Damien (Dorian Missick), a limo driver with a gambling problem (sigh), picks up a lucky penny that Laura lost on the street, and his fortunes turn. Apparently, there are eight million stories out there in this crazy, bighearted town—but it's all one story, really, the one about trusting in your dream. Please. Just play "New York, New York" and have done with it.

The deeper problem is that we always know more than the characters: we know that Laura's new au pair, Claire, is really Mae, and that she's on the run; that Whitney's boyfriend is a roué; that Carlos's client, accused of shooting a man, is innocent and that the actual shooter is his new friend, Damien. We're meant to be ensorcelled by the show's glittering web of serendipity, but we're just impatient: C'mon, people, get up to speed! One reason "Lost" sustains interest is that the characters know more than we do, so it's as if we're working alongside them to solve the island's mysteries. This makes us feel a part of their small tribe—as well as of the much larger one out there in the dark. It's a simple formula: "Lost" is more. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

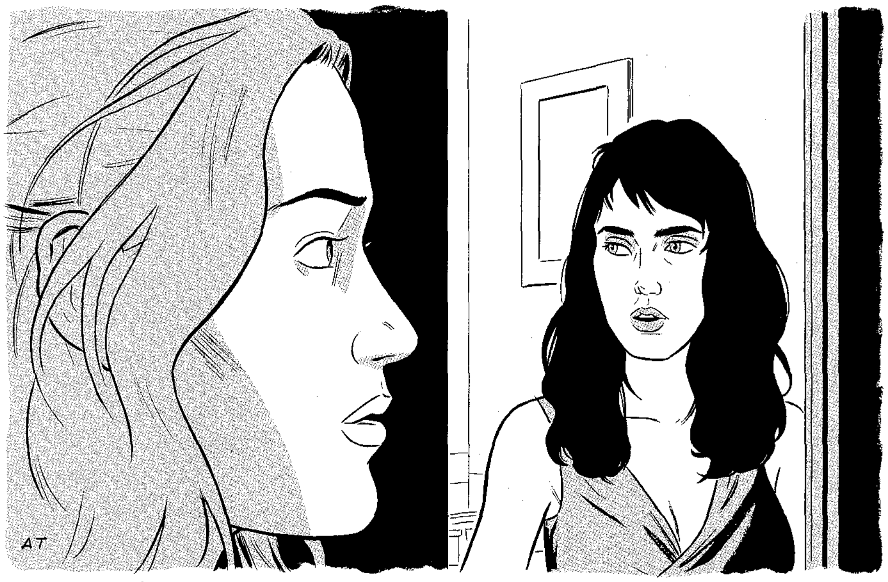
SMALL WORLDS

"Little Children" and "The Departed."

BY DAVID DENBY

Sarah Pierce (Kate Winslet), the thirtyish heroine of Todd Field's extraordinary new movie, "Little Children," dropped out of graduate school to marry an older man—a business consultant—and moved into a neo-Colonial house near Boston that he inherited from his mother. Some years have gone by, and the marriage is not in the best shape: Sarah's husband communes on the Internet with a friendly person known as Slutty Kay, and Sarah, unwilling to hire any help, feels imprisoned by their three-year-old daughter, whom she (rather negligently) looks after by herself. Sarah is the latest version of the baffled Americans that Betty Friedan wrote about forty years ago in "The Feminine Mystique"—the women supposedly living the American dream. What's particularly embittering in this case is that Sarah knew all about the trap and still stepped into it. Her face pale with disgust, she sits in a tiny suburban playground with three other young mothers who ruthlessly put down anyone who's even slightly different from themselves. These three witches—the only element of caricature in the movie—live on a rigidly controlled schedule. But there's an unaccountable element in their lives: Brad (Patrick Wilson), the good-looking, strongly built young man who makes them all flutter when he shows up at the playground with his little boy. Brad is married to a beautiful filmmaker (Jennifer Connelly) who works for PBS, leaving him at home to take care of the baby and to study for the state bar exam, which he has failed twice. A former golden-boy college jock stranded in adulthood, Brad is decent, not too bright, irresistibly attractive—a man designed for adultery. As the children take their daily nap, Sarah and Brad run to an empty corner of her house. If they leave town together, where will the kids fit in?

There's an element of garden-variety suspense in "Little Children," but sex and possible home-wrecking are only part of what the movie is about. "Little Children" is based on a best-selling 2004 novel by Tom Perrotta, who worked on the adaptation with Todd Field. Together, the men have preserved Perrotta's tone, which fluctuates between slightly satirical, even mischievous, irony and the most generous sympathy. Perrotta and Field make you see how their characters are weak or screwed up without allowing you to despise them. Moral realists, they know the world does not yield easily to desire. "Little Children" is a sharply intelligent and affecting view of suburban blues—a much bigger canvas than Field's previous movie, "In the Bedroom" (2001), which was about a placid middle-aged couple thrown into turmoil when their son takes up with an older woman separated from a violent man. Field has grown in ambition, but he still works on an intimate scale. He surrounds his characters with an intense stillness, and then slowly introduces the ungovernable into their lives.



Kate Winslet and Jennifer Connelly as suburban wives in Todd Field's movie.

ADRIAN TOMINE

Handsome Brad, it turns out, is not the only disturber of the peace. A convicted sex offender, Ronnie (Jackie Earle Haley), a polite, childlike fellow, has been released from prison and is living in the neighborhood with his mother. For parents who have moved to the suburbs to protect their children, Ronnie's presence is an unbearable outrage. Everyone is obsessed with him, especially a troubled ex-cop (Noah Emmerich), who runs around putting up pictures of Ronnie and forming committees to guard against him. After a while, one realizes that Perrotta and Field may be creating a metaphor of life under terrorism. It's not that Ronnie isn't a genuine threat, but he causes people to lose all sense. At the least, the filmmakers are hinting that both men and women are projecting their sexual frustrations and fears onto a pervert. What fuses Ronnie's story and the rest of the movie is the charged suggestion that outright perversion and ordinary unhappiness (sexual indifference, adultery, porn obsession, semi-psychotic rage) belong on the same spectrum of recognizable behavior. Almost everyone in town has a secret, or at least an itch.

Field works with such fluid grace and perception that the movie goes right to the top of the suburban-anguish genre. The picture is not as aggressively designed or as witty as "American Beauty"; nor is it as malicious as Todd Solondz's "Happiness." It's smarter, tougher, closer

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to the common life. Field captures, for instance, the way the daily routines of child care—getting a kid into a car seat or a hat, putting him down for a nap—have to be accommodated within the furious passions of adultery. The picture moves swiftly and surely; the separate shots that evoke the town are fitted together with uncanny precision, and Field neatly pulls off a big set piece that another director might have ruined with overemphasis. When Ronnie jumps into the town pool on a very hot day, the parents scream for their children and haul them out of the water, leaving Ronnie, in a mask, alone under the surface. As the police expel the invader, the children riotously jump back in, and the mass hysteria, followed by mass relief, is both sinister and funny—an interruption of summer pleasure that intentionally leaves our sympathy split between the alarmed parents and the sad outcast.

The sexual awakening of a disappointed wife may seem like an old movie turn, but when has it been done with such candor? At the beginning of the movie, Kate Winslet's hair looks dead, and she hides her body in denim overalls. Her Sarah is a slightly clumsy woman who has lost her confidence. When she falls in love with Brad, the transformation comes slowly and painfully: at first, a nervous gesture, a smile that turns anxious, and then a golden aureole of beauty, a body in movement. The sex scenes are brief, naked, heated, startling. But Winslet never quite loses the awkwardness and uncertainty that will always be Sarah's signature. Brad is not a type, either. Patrick Wilson, a stage actor who appeared in the movie version of "Phantom of the Opera," has a slightly puzzled air: his Brad is pleased by the attention of women, but he doesn't think much of himself, and Wilson, as a performer, seems quite without vanity. Looking at teen-age boys flying through the air on skateboards, Brad falls into a rapt silence; his longing for lost youth is so defenseless that it's impossible to dislike him, however irresolute he is as an adult. At first, Sarah and Brad seem prematurely defeated. Yet the filmmakers hold out the possibility of new life stirring under the domestic halter and the intellectual sloth. Adults may not be happier than overgrown children, but at least they have a chance of finding out who they are.

The small-time hoods in "Mean Streets," Martin Scorsese's breakthrough movie, from 1973, were not habitual users of the Queen's English. Some of the conversations between Robert De Niro and Harvey Keitel, improvised on the spot, would begin with one man saying a word or two, then the other grabbing at the words, turning them inside out, flinging them back, and so on, until a full-scale brawl was under way in which the emotions were flawlessly clear but the sentences little more than fragments. The habit of building a tempest out of nothing became a Scorsese trademark, widely imitated by other directors, including Dito Montiel, who made the new independent movie "A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints," in which almost every scene turns into a clamorously inarticulate fight. Scorsese, meanwhile, has moved on to a different mode of discourse. "The Departed" is not one of his greatest films; it doesn't use the camera to reveal the psychological and aesthetic dimensions of an entire world, as "Mean Streets," "Taxi Driver," "Raging Bull," and "Goodfellas" did. But it's a viciously merry, violent, high-wattage entertainment, and speech is the most brazenly flamboyant element in it. "The Departed" is a remake of the Hong Kong thriller "Infernal Affairs," directed by Andrew Lau and Alan Mak, and it has the speed and volatility of Hong Kong movies. But Scorsese and the screenwriter, William Monahan, have added weight to the cops-and-robbers plot by setting it in the Irish neighborhood of South Boston and by digging deep into urban tribal lore—the memories of loyalty and betrayal going back for decades, the nasty old jokes, the bullying insults and invective. The men commit obscene acts, and speak in cynical taunts, and the extreme violence and virtuoso cursing seem to feed off each other. It's still not the Queen's English, but every speech is complete in its profane eloquence.

Jack Nicholson's Southie crime lord, Frank Costello, sets the tone. Frank, who bears more than a passing resemblance to the notorious Boston thug James (Whitey) Bulger, is not isolated in high-walled solemnity, like the Italian grandees in "The Godfather." Instead, he's walking the street where people can see him; or he's mapping out strategy from a grotty little bar. Nicholson wears a satanic goatee and mustache, and his eyebrows flip up and down like semaphore flags; he gives the ultimate mad-Jack performance, a free-ranging and spontaneous impression, complete with Irish ditties, of a man who relishes each filthy deal and bone-crushing blow. "*Non serviam*," he growls at a neighborhood kid, an altar boy, quoting James Joyce—by which he means that every man must refuse obedience to institutions like the Church (obedience to institutions like the Mob is another matter). The boy in question grows into Colin Sullivan (Matt Damon), an ace detective in the Massachusetts State Police, and he belongs to Frank, tipping him off by cell phone when the police want to make a move on him. Colin's opposite number—almost his twin—is Billy Costigan (Leonardo DiCaprio), who's also a Statie, but a straight one. After a number of excruciating initiations, Billy, working undercover, penetrates Frank's inner circle. This is a double-mole story, in which the moles wind up hunting each other—the kind of interlocking narrative machinery that John le Carré used to construct in his spy novels. The deceptions of le Carré's spooks, however, depended on the spacious geography of international espionage. In the cloistered neighborhood and Police Headquarters of this film, each mole is constantly in danger of giving himself away to the people he sees every day.

The story is highly improbable, although Scorsese and Monahan keep the complicated goings on clear and taut, and the entire movie is acted with spirit and conviction. DiCaprio, his mouth pinched in tension, his voice gravelly and low, holds his own against Damon, who has a charming and plausible line of patter as the calculating Colin. Scorsese also gets terrific work from Mark Wahlberg, as a combustible but honest Special Investigations Unit cop, and Vera Farmiga, as a police psychiatrist who is drawn to neurotic and violent men. All the characters are unusually intelligent, and the fast, scurrilous talk binds the tightly edited short sequences together. Scorsese, however, is trying to do with words what he used to accomplish with the camera, and he doesn't produce the kind of emotional involvement that once made his movies so exhausting and also so satisfying. At the end, he seems eager to dispose of his characters in order to fill out a pattern: one after another gets shot at point-blank range (there's hardly an actor who retains the back of his head), and shock gives way to disbelief and even laughter. "The Departed" is murderous fun, but it's too shallow to be the kind of movie that haunts your sleep. ♦

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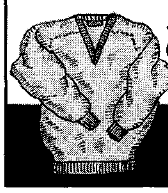

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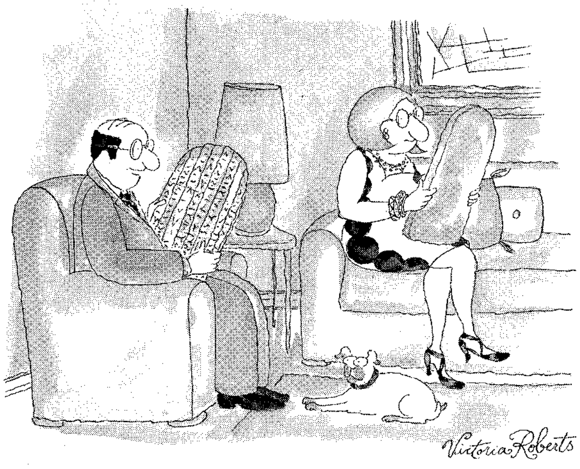
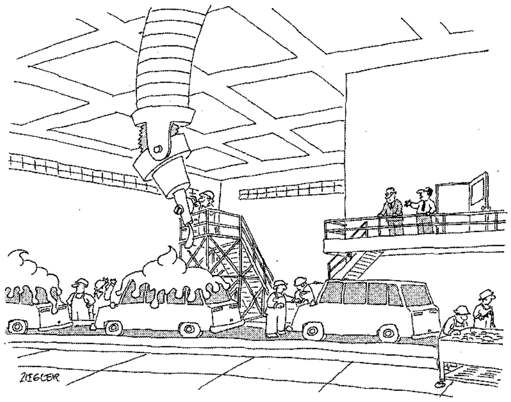
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Mike Twohy, must be received by Sunday, October 15th. Finalists in the October 2nd contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 30th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Wait, this is yesterday's."
Alex Wellen, Washington, D.C.



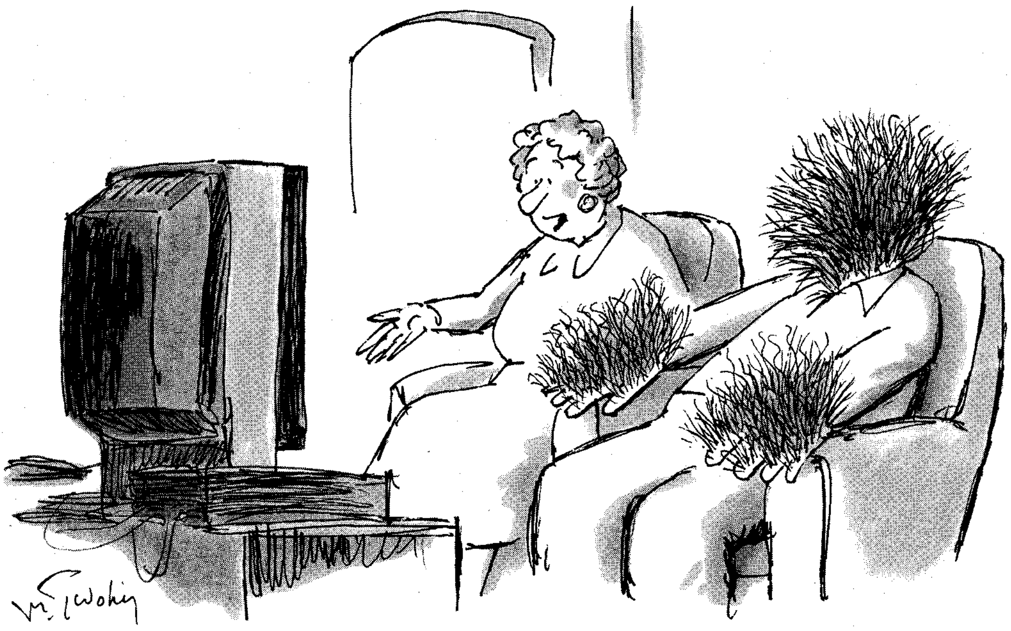
THE FINALISTS

"It was a big seller until we had to recall the cherries."
Lou Storey, Long Branch, N.J.

"By golly, Detroit is back!"
Ronald Nehring, Salt Lake City, Utah

"Would you believe a kid came up with this?"
Jonathan Steinhoff, Burbank, Calif.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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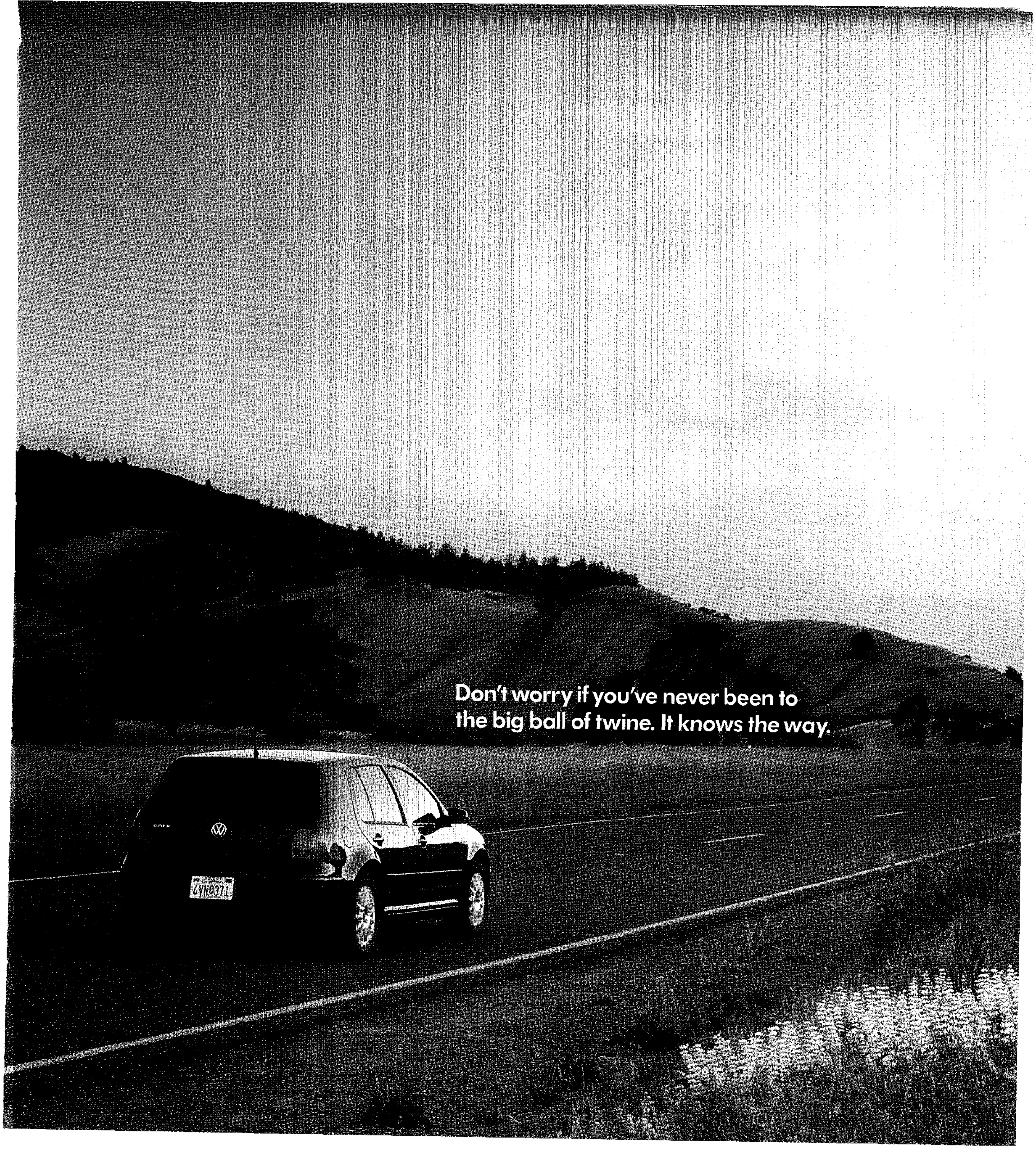

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